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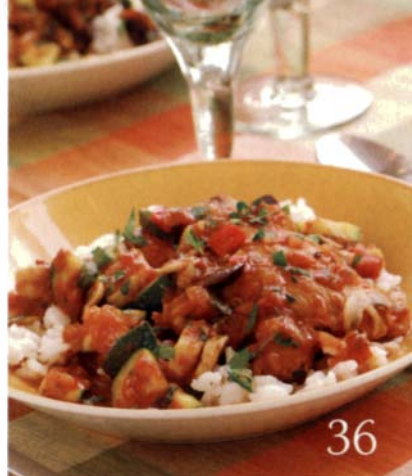
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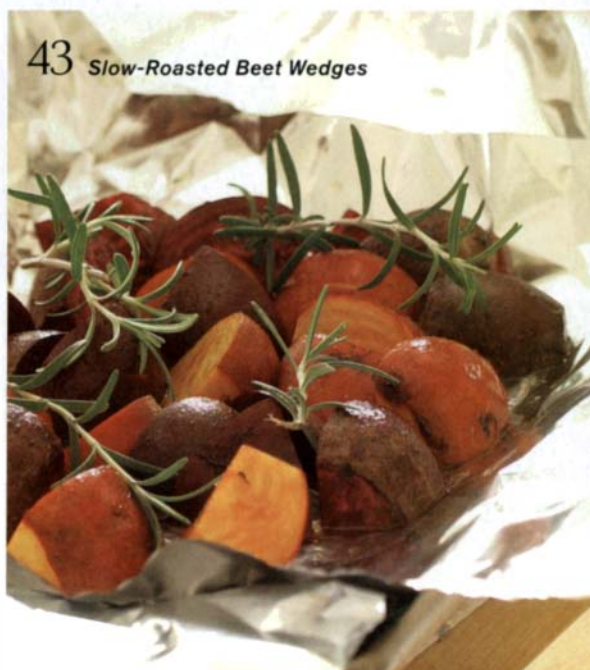
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## Go casual for winter gatherings

It's no mistake that this issue of *Fine Cooking* is full of comfort food, since this is the time of year we crave warming stews and soups and homey favorites like mashed potatoes and chocolate-chip cookies. If you're entertaining, whether it's for a couple of friends on a Saturday night or a small crowd for the Super Bowl, remember your guests will appreciate simple, satisfying food, too. The menus below (and our "Breakfast with Friends" menu on p. 48) are big on flavor without being too fussy. NOTE: Be sure to check each recipe's yield, as you may have to double or halve a recipe.

### Easy Dinner for Two

**Chicken Piccata with Fried Capers, p. 82C**

**Steamed Broccoli**

**Creamy Mashed Yukon Golds with Fresh Herbs, p. 47**

Mashed Yukon Gold potatoes—with a little parsley and basil added—are a great partner for lemony chicken piccata. Add a side of steamed broccoli to round out the meal.

### Mostly Make-Ahead Comfort Menu

**Slow-Cooked Pot Roast with Mustard & Horseradish Gravy, p. 70**

**Ultimate Fluffy Mashed Potatoes, p. 46**

**Simple Green Salad**

**Chocolate Pots de Crème, p. 66**

Make the puddings the night before. Turn on your slow cooker for the pot roast (or use a Dutch oven and reheat before serving). Wash a little lettuce, and all you'll have to do at the last minute is make the potatoes and dress the salad.

### Saturday Night Supper with Friends

**Frisly Lettuce Salad on a Bed of Beets with Lemon-Walnut Vinaigrette, p. 42**

**Chicken Thighs with Sausage & Braised Fennel, p. 40**

**Lemon Pots de Crème, p. 67**

A few bright flavors—goat cheese and watercress in the salad, fennel in the chicken stew, lemon in the dessert—are a nice contrast to the deeper winter flavors in this menu.

### Soul-Warming Sunday Lunch

**Spicy Southwestern Bloody Mary, p. 50**

**Tostones (Fried Plantains), p. 29**

**Slow-Cooked Memphis Ribs with Barbecue Sauce, p. 59**

**Warm Cabbage Slaw, p. 22**

**Herbed Buttermilk Biscuits, p. 52**

**Chocolate-Chip Cookies, p. 55**

A great menu for the Super Bowl. Salty, crispy *tostones* make a delicious snack with smoky, chipotle-laced Bloody Marys. While the game's on, guests can make up a plate of Memphis-style spareribs, warm cabbage slaw, and biscuits. Have a batch of chocolate-chip cookies on hand for the fourth quarter.

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# from the editor

## COLD WEATHER, WARM KITCHEN

Every season has its culinary delights, but for me, winter is the best time to cook. True, my choice of tomato is now limited to sun-dried or canned (which isn't necessarily a bad thing—see the Tasting Panel on p. 74), and the pots of herbs outside my kitchen door just look like mounds of snow, but classic winter dishes—stews, braises, roasted meats and vegetables, puddings—are my favorites. I'm always fascinated by the alchemy that turns a few vegetables, a cheap cut of meat, and plain old water into a deeply flavored, soul-warming experience. But as any good cook knows, it's not really magic that does the transformation, it's understanding your ingredients and using good technique—information that we try to highlight in each issue of *Fine Cooking*. And on the subject of winter cooking, see p. 14 for the announcement about our holiday cookie exchange—we want your best recipes so you can be part of our next Holiday Baking issue.

—Martha Holmberg,  
editor in chief

## A curiously resourceful reader

I'm a new subscriber (a crossover from *Fine Woodworking*), and I love your magazine. I just wanted to make a plea and share an anecdote.

**Plea:** Please don't abandon the "Cooking Without Recipes" feature. It's a wonderful idea. I loved the one on cream sauce pastas.

**Anecdote:** I had a great time making the peppermint brownies from the *Fine Cooking* #52, p. 49. They were very good, although I was forced to make one rather unconventional replacement. The night before I planned to take the brownies to a party, I went to three supermarkets in search of peppermint extract. I struck out and was despondent in the checkout line at the third market. Suddenly, there appeared before me a curi-

ously strong solution.

I rushed home and ground up about two dozen newly purchased Altoids and cut back on the sugar a bit. The brownies were great, and we all went home with fresh breath.

This may explain why I'm so keen to cook without recipes.

—Jeff Diamond, via e-mail

## Keep it colder, keep it longer

The Holiday Baking issue (#54) is excellent. I am considering a scale because of your article. One small thing: on p. 34 in Great Finds, you feature Saco powdered buttermilk. I use it, and it does work well. However you say it keeps indefinitely in the cupboard, but the carton says to keep refrigerated after opening for the longest shelf life.

—Gary Havlatka, via e-mail



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# <sup>fine</sup>Cooking ...around the country

## A dough with a different purpose

In *Fine Cooking* #52, Carolyn Weil's butter pie dough recipe (p. 78) called for 2 cups of unbleached all-purpose flour, but in the Holiday Baking issue (#54) Carolyn's butter pie dough recipe called for 2½ cups of unbleached all-purpose flour (with the other remaining ingredients exactly the same). Why is there such a difference? Please comment!

—Katherine Wong, via e-mail

**Editors' reply:** Carolyn made her dough in the Holiday Baking issue "sturdier" and slightly less rich so that making the leaf decorations would be easier. Even with the extra flour, however, the dough is flaky and buttery and suitable for most pies.

## What's the rush?

**We like being in the kitchen** I have to take exception with your lead story on preparing a Thanksgiving meal in under four hours (#53, p. 44).

Like so many other families, we are busy and appreciate time-saving tips. But like families who love to cook, time in the kitchen preparing good food for friends and family is time away from the rush and impatience of our everyday lives. Let's not let fairy tales of 15-minute meals and weight loss in 30 seconds a day spill over to one of the most enjoyable activities we pursue. Our mothers told us that good takes time—they were right.

—Neil Salkind, via e-mail ♦

**January 24-26:** Boston Cooks! World Trade Center, **Boston**. Celebrity chef demos, kitchen equipment, cookbooks, and specialty foods. For info, visit [www.bostoncooks.com](http://www.bostoncooks.com).

**January 31 through February 2:** Twin Cities Food & Wine Experience at the **Minneapolis Convention Center**. Wine-makers' dinner, wine lunches, grand tastings, seminars, and equipment. Call 866-895-8911 or see [www.foodwineshow.com](http://www.foodwineshow.com) for details.

**February 1-2:** Boston Wine Expo at the World Trade Center, **Boston**. Hundreds of wines from around the world, celebrity chefs, wine tasting seminars, and a Vintner's Dinner and Sunday Brunch. Call 877-946-3976 or visit [www.wine-expo.com](http://www.wine-expo.com) for information.

**February 25-26:** Contributing editor Molly Stevens teaches classes at Sur La Table in **Dallas**. Call 214-219-4404 or visit [www.surlatable.com](http://www.surlatable.com) for info.

**March 15-16:** Napa Valley Mustard Festival, **Napa, California** at the Napa Exposition. Mustards gourmet products, wines, and specialty brews. For info, call 707-938-1133 or visit [www.mustardfestival.org](http://www.mustardfestival.org).

**March 18:** Editor-in-chief Martha Holmberg teaches weekend dinner menus at De Gustibus Cooking School at Macy's in **New York City**. For information and reservations, call 212-439-1714.

**March 26-30:** *Fine Cooking* joins its sister publications from The Taunton Press at the Western Massachusetts Home & Garden Show at the Eastern States Exposition Grounds, **West Springfield, Massachusetts**. For a schedule, visit [www.westernmasshomeshow.com](http://www.westernmasshomeshow.com).

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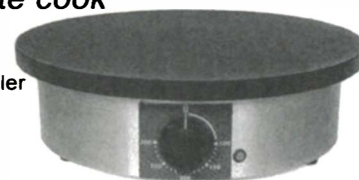
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# cookie exchange

## We want your best cookie recipe

This time of year, you may be turning your attention to planning your spring garden, but at *Fine Cooking*, we're jumping ahead to next Christmas and our next Holiday Baking issue.

We love the idea of a cookie exchange—each member of a group of, say, eight friends makes eight dozen of her or his favorite cookie. Then they all exchange, and each friend ends up with a dozen each of eight different kinds of cookie. We'd like to try a "virtual" version of a cookie exchange with our readers, sharing the recipes if not the cookies themselves.

So send us your favorite original holiday cookie recipe. Our baking guru and contributing editor Abby Dodge will review, test, and choose a

great selection that we'll publish in our next Holiday Baking issue, due out November 2003.

Be sure your recipe is original, meaning it's something you've developed yourself or an old family favorite (not a recipe that you cut out of a magazine a few years ago...we need to be mindful of copyright issues.)

And tell us why this cookie is so good—the flavor, texture, keeping qualities, looks, best version of a traditional cookie, easy to do ahead...whatever makes it one of your favorites.

### Tips for writing a great cookie recipe:

**Flour.** If you can, use a scale and tell us how much the flour weighs. If you use measuring cups, please spoon the flour into the cup and level it off with a knife. And tell us what brand of flour you use.

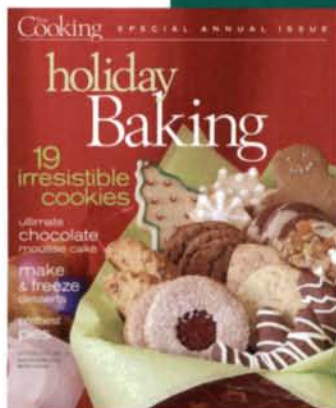
**Sugar:** Specify granulated, light, or dark brown sugar.

**Eggs:** Specify what size and how warm or cool.

**Nuts:** Specify how finely chopped, toasted or not.

**Describe the texture** of the dough at various stages—should it feel crumbly, stiff, sticky, silky? Tell us the size of the drop or the thickness of the slice, as well as the type of pan you use and whether it's greased or ungreased. Precision and detail will help us get the results you want us to get.

**Deadline:** Send entries by mail, fax, or e-mail to be received on or before April 1, 2003 to: Cookie Exchange, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506; fax 203-426-3434; or [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com) (put "cookie exchange" in the subject line).



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## She Turned Her Passion For Cooking Into A Profitable Business!

**H**ave utensils, will travel could be Susan Titcomb's motto. Fourteen years ago, Titcomb, a 41 year old mother of two from San Diego, California, had a passion for cooking and a desire to control her own destiny. Armed with an idea, her husband's support, very little capital and virtually no business experience, she started the country's first personal chef service. Personally Yours Personal Chef Service became an overnight success and spurred her on to become a cofounder of the United States Personal Chef Association. "A personal chef can make \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year, depending upon the hours worked and the number of clients", says Titcomb. Since most clients work full-time, Titcomb goes into their home and cooks 10 meals for the whole family. Her service includes grocery shopping, preparation, cooking, packaging and cleanup. With a cost as low as \$10 per meal, per person, Titcomb always has a long waiting list. So what does it take to become a personal chef? "Organization, persistence, a love of cooking and a little know how," says Titcomb. For more information, call the United States Personal Chef Association at 1-800-995-2138 or go to <http://www.uspca.com>. Training and resources available for all experience levels.



READER SERVICE NO. 94



**TONY ROSENFELD** ("Chicken Stews," p. 36) learned the importance of seasoning food well and trusting good, simple flavors as a cook at Bastianelli al Molo in Fiumicino, Italy. After apprenticing with Giuliano Bugialli at his cooking school in Florence, Tony honed his cooking skills in Boston (at L'Espalier and Anago restaurants) and his food writing skills (for *The Boston Globe*) before landing at *Fine Cooking* in 2001, where he's an associate editor.



Though born and raised in England, **MARTIN COURTMAN** ("Pot de Crème," p. 64) is completely at home living and cooking in northern California, where he has been the executive chef at Chateau Souverain winery in Sonoma for the past twelve years. Martin trained in classic French technique at Harlow College in Essex and graduated as valedictorian of his class with top honors.



Steve Johnson

**SUSIE MIDDLETON** ("Beets," p. 41) learned to roast beets in the wood-fired 600°F ovens of Al Forno Restaurant in Providence, Rhode Island. "It's a lot easier to roast beets at home, since you won't singe your arms when you reach into the oven," she says. Susie is the executive editor of *Fine Cooking*.



Eva Katz

**ROY FINAMORE** and **MOLLY STEVENS** ("Mashed Potatoes," p. 44) are the authors of the acclaimed potato bible, *One Potato, Two Potato*. They frequently take to the road, bringing the secrets of perfect mashed potatoes to cooking schools around the country. Roy is a leading editor of lifestyle and cookbooks at Clarkson Potter, where his authors have included Martha Stewart, Diana Kennedy, and Ina Garten. Molly is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*.



Susie Middleton

As evinced by their latest book, *A Real American Breakfast*, **CHERYL ALTERS JAMISON** and **BILL JAMISON** ("Breakfast with Friends," p. 48) are breakfast experts. The duo has written a dozen cookbooks and guides

to food, culture, barbecue, and travel. Several of their best-selling titles—*American Home Cooking*, *Smoke & Spice*, and *Born to Grill*—have snagged coveted awards from the James Beard Foundation and the International Association of Culinary Professionals.

**BONNIE GORDER-HINCHEY** ("Chocolate-Chip Cookies," p. 53) is the director of culinary services for Publicis Dialog, one of the top five marketing communications agencies. She's a food scientist who has developed recipes for Starbucks, General Mills, and Nestlé.

Although throughout the year there's a large, wood-burning grill in his bustling Cambridge, Massachusetts, restaurant The Blue Room, **STEVE JOHNSON** ("Oven-Roasted Ribs," p. 56) understands the plight of the grilling aficionado in the cold

winter months. In response to the Northeast's long, snowy winters, Steve created his oven-roasted ribs. In the summer months, Steve likes fishing the Atlantic for striped bass and bluefish, and grilling, of course. He contributed to the recently released *The Pleasures of Slow Food*.

**EVA KATZ** ("Asian Noodle Soups," p. 60) called the east coast of Australia home for three years, where almost every neighborhood had an Asian noodle shop. While in Australia, Eva wrote for *Australian Gourmet Traveler* and *Australian Vogue* and was the culinary consultant to an Australian winery. Before moving to the other side of the world, she worked as the test kitchen director at *Cook's Illustrated*. She studied and taught at the Cambridge School of Culinary Arts in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She now lives in Boston.



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COMPILED BY TONY ROSENFELD



### An alternative to balsamic

This unusually sweet, amber-colored vinegar is made from Moscatel, a Spanish dessert wine. The vinegar's light bite is subtle enough to accompany roasted fish or chicken. You can also add a drizzle to a dessert where a touch of tartness is needed.

A 17-ounce bottle is \$6 at Ideal Cheese Shop (800-382-0109; [www.idealcheese.com](http://www.idealcheese.com)).

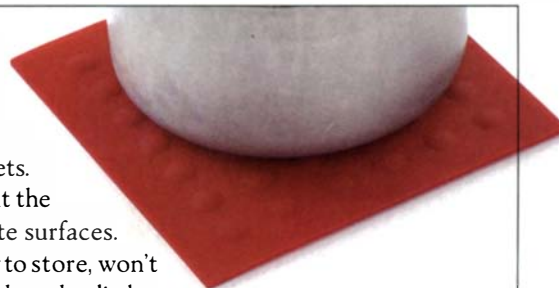


### Smooth, tangy cheese

The incredibly tangy flavor and smooth mouthfeel of Vermont Butter & Cheese's fromage blanc belie the fact that this versatile cheese has no fat. I like to use it dolloped over fresh berries or melon with a sprinkling of brown sugar, but you can use it in savory dishes like mashed potatoes, as well as in dips, dressings, and sauces. It's susceptible to curdling, so it's best not to heat it. \$3.50 for 8 ounces at supermarkets; or call 800-884-6287 or visit [www.vtbutterandcheeseco.com](http://www.vtbutterandcheeseco.com).

### Silicone potholders double as trivets

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### Countertop crock keeps butter soft

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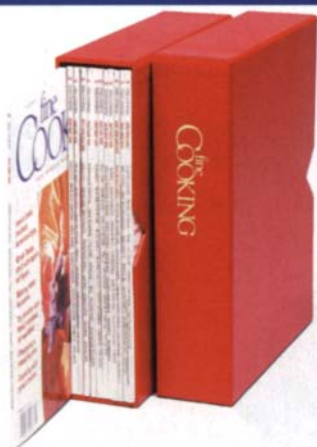
### Toasted pasta is an easy side dish

Fregola, made by rubbing semolina flour and water into pea-sized rounds and then toasting them, is a staple of the Italian island of Sardinia, where the pasta is often paired with brothy stews or served as baked pasta. I like to boil fregola until it's just tender and then bake it in the oven under roasted meats or sausage. A 1.1-pound bag is \$4.95 at Fornaggio Kitchen (888-212-3224; [www.fornaggiokitchen.com](http://www.fornaggiokitchen.com)).





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READER SERVICE NO. 95



# Slow Cookers

A timeless appliance for all cooks

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL



I opted for a small, untraditional wedding, not knowing there would be a price to pay—not one Crock-Pot in the gift cache. Fortunately, my sister went big when she'd married the month before, acquiring not one but three slow cookers, and she was glad to share.

I've since had a few years to work with this nifty appliance. And while my slow cooker—Crock-Pot is a registered brand name of Rival—might go unused for weeks at a time, when it's put to work, the results (and the convenience) are remarkable. Whether I've spent the day in the office or doing yard work, there's nothing like coming home to find dinner in my slow cooker, hot and ready.

What makes a slow cooker so useful is its ability to cook low and slow, hovering around 200°F on a

low heat setting. This is hard to replicate on the stovetop without babysitting and adjusting the burner. And most home ovens aren't that accurate under 250°F, a temperature so gentle that you'll hardly see a stew burble.

A slow cooker works its best magic on tough cuts of meat. The moist, gentle heat melts the rubbery collagen in the connective tissue of the meat to a fork-tender texture. Here are some of my favorite candidates for my slow cooker:

**Beef:** Anything from the chuck, including arm and shoulder roasts, as well as brisket, shanks, short ribs, and bottom round cuts (see the recipe for pot roast on p. 70).

**Pork:** Any shoulder cuts, including shoulder blade

roast, picnic, and Boston butt.

**Lamb:** Shoulder cuts and shanks.

**Chicken:** Cut-up parts are the best bet for a slow cooker. I've found that a whole chicken heats up too slowly. Also, remove the skin before cooking, as it will get flabby, never crisp.

**Dried beans:** Cooking these in a slow cooker is a real convenience. It's great not to have to constantly check the water level and heat. The extended cooking time lets flavors gradually marry, always a plus for chili, stews, soups, baked beans, and other flavored bean dishes.

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's editor at large. ♦

## Editors' Choice

### Smart-Pot Crock-Pot

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We tested a handful of different slow cookers. Our favorite was the latest model from Rival.

If you start a pot roast in the morning but get tied up late at work, you can rest assured your meal won't be overcooked with this programmable slow cooker. You can set it to cook for 4 or 6 hours on high or 8 or 10 hours on low. When the time is up, the cooker automatically adjusts to a warm setting until it's turned off. A version of the Smart-Pot exclusive to Williams-Sonoma lets you choose the heat level and any number of hours before the appliance switches to the warm setting—but for that convenience, you'll need to pay another \$30 (\$69.95 total).

## Tips

- ❖ **Avoid removing the lid during cooking.** Stirring isn't usually necessary, but if you do need to lift the lid, you may need to add 15 to 20 minutes to the cooking time, depending on how much heat is lost.
- ❖ **To monitor the internal temperature of meats,** use a thermometer probe that connects to a readout base with a thin filament (for sources, see p. 76).
- ❖ **Don't tilt the lid as you remove it.** Gently lift it straight up to avoid spilling condensation into the crock and diluting the cooking liquid.



## What to look for when buying a slow cooker

Cookware stores tend to carry a limited selection of slow cookers. Your best bet is to look in a general housewares store or even a well-stocked hardware store. While you're shopping, be on the lookout for these features:

**SIDE HEATING ELEMENTS.** I prefer slow cookers with heating elements housed within the unit's side walls rather than the base so that, like an oven, heat surrounds the food. Unfortunately, most slow cookers don't indicate this on the box.

**A "WARM" SETTING.** Once the power is off, the ceramic crock doesn't hold heat well. So this setting is ideal for when the food is done but you're not quite ready to serve it.

**A POWER LIGHT.** Amazingly, most slow cookers don't have this feature, which is too bad since the dials can easily be turned off if they're nudged inadvertently.

**SIZE.** Consider how you'll use the cooker—will you want to make enough for many servings or just a single meal? For the pot roast recipe on p. 70, which serves four, a 6-quart slow cooker is ideal. Keep in mind that the cooker works best when it's filled at least halfway.

**SHAPE.** Think about what kind of food you'll be cooking. We're partial to oval cookers, which easily fit roasts, long ribs, and other odd-shaped cuts.

**THE LID.** The lid (preferably glass) should fit snugly and without gaps where it rests on the crock insert, so that steam can't escape. A little side-to-side wiggle room is fine.

**REMOVABLE INSERTS.** Most models now have removable ceramic crock inserts, which make cleanup a lot easier. Some are even dishwasher safe. Also, look for inserts with handles that are easy to grip with potholders.

## Adapting recipes for a slow cooker

If you pick up a cookbook dedicated to slow cookers, you'll find many, many foods that you can cook in one. You can even "bake" a chocolate cake. For cakes and other recipes you'd never identify with this appliance, you're best off following a recipe designed especially for a slow cooker, preferably the exact model you own (the heat intensity varies among brands and models). On the other hand, regular recipes that call for slow simmering, braising, or stewing are well suited to a slow cooker. Here are some tips for adapting these types of recipes to your slow cooker:

**BROWN MEATS AND POULTRY** in a skillet on the stovetop before adding them to the cooker. This boosts flavor, adds color, and renders fat.

**USE THE LOW HEAT SETTING FOR TOUGH CUTS.** Turning the heat to high will shorten the cooking time but won't deliver nearly as tender results.

**ROOT VEGETABLES ARE SLOW TO COOK THROUGH,** so cut them into pieces no larger than 1 inch and put them in the bottom of the pot so they'll be surrounded by hot liquid.

**IN A COVERED SLOW COOKER, LIQUIDS HAVE NO PLACE TO EVAPORATE** and foods release yet more liquid as they cook. If you have excess liquid at the end of the cooking time or if the flavor is diluted, simmer the liquid in a saucepan (straining if necessary) until it has the consistency and flavor intensity you want.

**ADD MORE FRESH HERBS AND SPICES** to taste at the end of cooking (and after reducing the liquid, if needed) to boost flavor and freshness.

**AVOID ADDING MILK, CHEESE, OR SOUR CREAM** to a recipe until the last hour of cooking. With the exception of processed cheeses, dairy products will separate with long cooking. Evaporated milk is a safe substitute.

## Upgrade an Old Cooker



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If you already own a slow cooker, you can buy a Smart-Pot module, which lets you program heat levels and cooking times. Plug your slow cooker into the module and then plug the module into an electrical outlet. There are three settings to cater to the model of slow cooker you have, and the heat and time settings are the same as for the Smart-Pot Crock-Pot at left. To determine the setting for your machine, the manual lists the model numbers and corresponding settings for Rival Crock-Pots. It also includes instructions for other brands, as long as they're rated 400 watts or less.



# In Winter, Cabbage is King

BY RUTH LIVELY

Cabbage suffers unfairly from a poor image. For many people, just the mere mention of it conjures up bad memories. But properly treated, cabbage is sweet, mild, and delicious. It's also extremely nutritious—high in vitamin C and many antioxidants.

Although cheap and plentiful year-round, cabbage is king in winter. Gardeners take note: Cabbages grown in cool weather and touched by frost are likely to be sweeter than those grown in warm weather. At the market, it's easy to select good cabbage. Choose heads that are heavy and firm. Avoid any with a dried or cracked stem, which indicates an old cabbage that's liable to be bitter.



## Warm Cabbage Slaw with Bacon Dressing

*Serves four to six as a side dish.*

This is an easy side dish to serve with pork chops, sausages, or any roasted meat.

**3 thick slices bacon, diced**  
**1/3 cup diced onion**  
**1/4 cup cider vinegar**  
**1 pound green cabbage,**  
**shredded (4 packed cups)**  
**Kosher salt**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**

In a large skillet over medium heat, cook the bacon until crisp, 5 to 7 minutes; transfer with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels. Add the onion to the bacon fat in the

skillet and cook over medium heat until softened, about 2 minutes. Carefully pour in the vinegar along with 1/4 cup water. Use a wooden spoon to scrape up any browned bits in the bottom of the skillet and bring the dressing to a boil. Add the cabbage, sprinkle with salt, and cook, stirring frequently, until the smaller shreds are wilted and the larger shreds are still slightly crunchy, 3 to 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve immediately or keep warm for up to 20 minutes.



## The red, the white, and the green

There are three main types of European-style (as opposed to Chinese) cabbage, including green (sometimes called white); savoy, with lovely crinkled green and yellow leaves; and red. Green cabbage (left) is my standard choice, and works well with any of the preparations described at right. Savoy cabbage (below) has a lighter texture, thanks to its wrinkled leaves, and is especially beautiful in slaw or cut into wedges and steamed or braised. I prefer to use red cabbage (top) raw, because the coloring that makes it so pretty fades with cooking to a drab gray. But cooking red cabbage in an acidic liquid such as wine or vinegar

does help the vegetable retain its color. Avoid cutting red cabbage with a carbon-steel knife or cooking it in an aluminum pot, both of which also cause discoloration.





## Try versatile cabbage in slaws, sautés, braises, and soups

Cabbage's sweet-tangy flavor complements a wide variety of foods, making it extremely versatile. Cooked, it's a good counterpoint to beef, pork, chicken, game, and dried beans of all colors; raw or quickly stir-fried, cabbage pairs well with fish and shellfish. Good seasonings for cabbage include bay leaf, juniper berries, caraway seeds, bacon, and onion for cooked dishes; try lime juice or zest, ginger, or dill for raw preparations. A great way to introduce yourself to the pleasant flavor and texture of cabbage is to try the Warm Cabbage Slaw at left. Or try one of the ideas below.

### MAKE A TANGY, OIL-FREE

**SLAW.** Toss two cups of shredded cabbage with a tablespoon or two of lime juice, half a teaspoon of salt, and a few shakes of hot paprika. Let sit, toss, and serve as a base for a winter salad of avocado and mango.

### FOLD FINELY SHREDDED

**CABBAGE INTO TACOS** and sandwich wraps, or toss a handful into a salad for a nice crunch and more flavor and nutrition than lettuce provides.

### BOIL SLENDER WEDGES OF

**CABBAGE** in salted water until just tender. Drain, dress with butter, malt or balsamic vinegar, and a little salt.

### ENHANCE A VEGETABLE

**OR BEEF SOUP** with a large handful of chopped or shredded cabbage. The cabbage will give the finished soup a deeper, rounder, more complex flavor, without announcing its presence.

### MAKE A MELTINGLY

**TENDER BRAISE** of red cabbage, apples, and onions. Sauté shredded red cabbage in butter

with sliced onions and apples. Add a little wine or vinegar and braise until tender. Serve with grilled sausages.

### WRAP UP CABBAGE ROLLS.

My favorite are a Greek version, filled with a mixture of ground lamb and rice, seasoned with garlic, oregano, and fresh or dried mint. Roll a tablespoon of the filling into whole blanched cabbage leaves, arrange in layers in a heavy pot, season with olive oil, salt, pepper, and bay leaf, cover with beef or lamb broth, and simmer until the meat and rice are cooked through.

### BRAISE SAVOY CABBAGE

for a satisfying winter side dish. Sauté thick wedges in butter until lightly colored. Add chicken or beef broth and season with salt, pepper, bay leaf, and thyme. Cover and simmer until tender.

### MAKE A GINGERY ASIAN

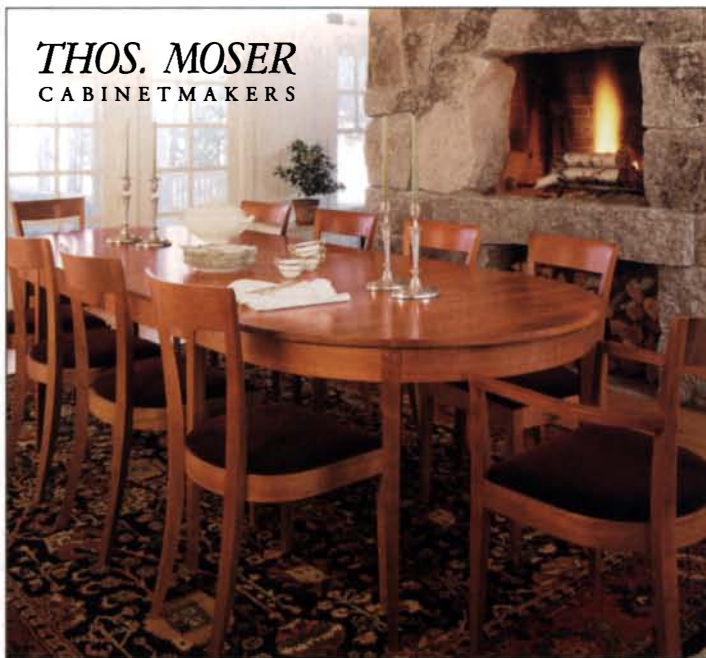
**SLAW** by tossing shredded savoy cabbage with rice vinegar, soy sauce, and grated fresh ginger. Garnish with a little shredded carrot and sliced scallions.

### Handling tip

I use my Boerner V-slicer to make finely shredded cabbage in a flash, but a chef's knife works just as well. For wedges, I cut a head in half, lay the half flat and then cut into portions, each with a section of core to keep the wedge intact during cooking. For more on cutting cabbage, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 68.

Ruth Lively is the former senior editor of Kitchen Gardener magazine. ♦

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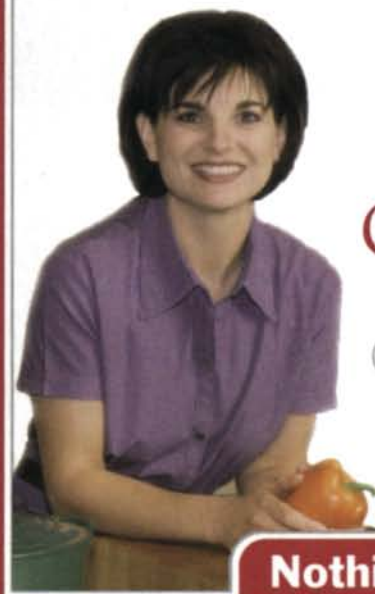
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## Smart Design, Great Looks

BY AMY ALBERT

**C**ontinuous, uninterrupted counter-space was Diane Morgan's top priority when she redesigned her kitchen in Portland, Oregon, six years ago. A cookbook author, Diane "wanted to be able to roll out dough or do other big projects and have enough space for all the things I like to have close at hand when I work—ingredients, cookbooks, cooling

racks, and utensils." Diane's other big concern was overhead cabinets—she didn't want them ("Whatever you need always seems to be behind something else, and you have to reach for it.") The solution: a 13-foot-long work island lined with drawers.

This kitchen is eye-poppingly gorgeous, for sure—but it also feels welcom-

ing, and it's an easy, fun place to work, a place where high function and great looks go hand in hand.

*Amy Albert is Fine Cooking's senior editor.* ♦

*Want to take a virtual tour of this kitchen? Visit our Web site, [www.finecooking.com](http://www.finecooking.com), and click on "online extras."*





*Continuous counterspace and undercounter storage drove the design of this user-friendly kitchen.*



*Diane wanted a roomy farmhouse sink but she could only find porcelain versions, so she designed one in stainless steel.*



*Behind this door is Breakfast Central. The toaster oven, espresso machine, and coffee grinder are within easy reach.*

## Drawer storage keeps counters clear

Diane opted for drawers instead of cabinets throughout most of the kitchen. Sectioned pullouts keep hand tools and other small items organized. An anchored magnet keeps knives within easy reach and prevents them from banging around. To make the most of each drawer, Diane measured her biggest pots, widest woks, and longest sheet pans and designed drawers to fit them—including one deep enough for a mixer and food processor.





**I've noticed white specks on some kalamata olives in my refrigerator. What are they?**

—Laura Pease, via e-mail

**A** **Terry Huggins replies:** When buying olives, you'll notice they're generally immersed in a salt-water solution, or brine. The salt in the brine helps draw out acidity from the olives, which makes them fit for consumption. The brine (which may also include vinegar, olive oil, and herbs) also flavors and preserves the olives, and is probably responsible for the white specks on your olives, particularly if they've been packed in a container without the brine, as is often done at the supermarket deli counter.

After four or five days out of their brine, kalamatas and other olives may develop specks on their surface, a result of oxygen drawing the brine's salt from the meat of the olive to its surface.

To remove the spots, soak the olives in a little cool water. Afterward, make a homemade brine for storing the olives by stirring 1 tablespoon salt into 1 cup water. In the future, ask the deli attendant to add some brine to your purchase; this way, your olives should keep for a couple of months in the refrigerator. Also, remember to remove olives from the refrigerator about an hour before serving so that the olive's natural oils aren't congealed. The olives will be easier to digest.

*Terry Huggins is the charcuterie manager at Dean & DeLuca in New York City.*

**Is it best to heat up a pan before adding the oil for sautéing?**

—Andrew Nemicola, Austin, Texas

**A** **Molly Stevens replies:** To answer this question, I conducted several side-by-side tests of heating the pan before adding the oil and heating the pan and oil together. In the end, I found very little difference between these two approaches, which leads me to surmise that the best method depends on your surroundings and your pan.

Professional line cooks typically keep several pans heating at all times. When an order comes in, all they need to do is splash in some oil (it heats quickly in the superhot pan) and add the food. If they were to add the oil any earlier, it would smoke and burn as the pans sit waiting.

For home cooks, it may be more of a question of your habit and your equipment. Both light-duty and nonstick cookware can become damaged if overheated. For these

pans, it's best to heat the pan and the oil simultaneously. On the other hand, cast-iron and other heavy cookware take a long time to heat evenly. If oil is added to a cold pan, there is a chance that it will begin to smoke before the pan is evenly heated.

Regardless of which method you choose, remember that the key to proper sautéing is to have both the pan and oil (or any other fat, such as butter) hot enough so that the ingredients sear rather than steam—there should be an audible hiss when the food hits the pan. A cold pan or cold oil will result in food that's soggy, oily, or otherwise compromised.

*Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the co-author of One Potato, Two Potato.*

**Why is it that recipes often call for rinsing Asian noodles after cooking, but not Italian pasta?**

—Joey Canfeld, via e-mail

**A** **Steve Bogart replies:** Italian and Asian cuisines treat noodles differently because the types of noodles they use are different—and the effects they're looking for vary as well.

Italian cooks generally don't rinse their pasta, which is usually made of durum or semolina flour. After cooking and draining the pasta, Italian cooks combine it directly with the sauce. The starchy surface of the pasta thickens the sauce and helps the sauce cling to the pasta.

In most Asian cuisines, a noodle's starch isn't prized in the finished dish, and this guides their treatment of the noodles. It's important to note that most Asian cooks generally don't so much rinse as "refresh" their noodles. When cooking wheat noodles, Asian cooks will often add cold water to the boiling noodles, or plunge a colander of noodles into cold water and then back into boiling water. This momentary cooling lets the noodles relax (much like letting a dough sit) and gives them an even, soft texture.

The Asian dried rice noodles and thin mung bean noodles used in soups and stir-fries are often soaked, not cooked, in a large amount of the hottest tap water for 20 minutes. After being drained, the noodles are stirred into a hot soup or cooked in a brothy stir-fry, where they will continue to absorb liquid.

*Steve Bogart has been studying Asian cuisine for the last thirty years. He's the chef-owner of Single Pebble Restaurants in Barre and Burlington, Vermont. ♦*

Do you have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com), and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.



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# Plantains, a Cuban favorite

BY TANIA SIGAL

A fascinating aspect of plantains is that, as they ripen, they seem to transform into a new ingredient. I usually buy six or seven very green, unripe plantains. I pan-fry half of them within a day or two for *tostones*, and I'll let the rest ripen on my counter. After several days, they start turning yellow and speckled with black spots. At this point, they're semiripe, ideal for boiling and mashing. I wait several more days until they're fully ripe and their starches have turned to sugars to make baked sweet plantains. The plantains will be black and mushy, so fight your instinct to toss them out. Rest assured, this is the plantain's sweetest moment and your cue to start baking.

To hasten ripening, put the plantains in a paper bag and leave them at room temperature. Don't use a plastic bag, as the trapped humidity will cause the fruit to get moldy.

## Books

To learn more about Cuban cooking, Tania Sigal recommends *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen*, by Mary Urrutia Randelman; *Cuba Cocina*, by Joyce Lafray; and *A Taste of Old Cuba*, by María Josefa Lluriá de O'Higgins.

If I had to pick one ingredient that shouts "Cuban cooking" to me, it would have to be the plantain. Cubans seem to have adopted this large banana-like fruit as their own, giving it a special place not only in their kitchens but also their lives. As noted in *A Taste of Old Cuba*, when a foreigner becomes fully integrated with Cuban culture and customs, he is *aplatanado*, which is to say that he has been "plantainized."

But for all their pride of ownership, Cubans can't claim plantains as their native plant. The fruit probably originated in India and landed in the Caribbean via the Spanish settlers. Plantains are cheap, versatile, and highly nutritious (they're a good source of potassium, fiber, and vitamin C), so it's no wonder they've become a major crop in this region, as well as throughout Latin and South America.

When it comes to cooking, plantains are really more of a vegetable than a fruit. They're larger and firmer than their banana relative, and they're not sweet: They must be cooked to become palatable. With their bland, starchy, somewhat potato-like flavor, plantains take well to many cooking methods. In Cuba, as well as in Miami and other Cuban communities, plantains are often sliced and deep-fried to make chips, or pan-fried to make *tostones* (see the recipe at far right), a crisp smashed plantain appetizer or side dish that's delicious plain or dipped in a garlicky lime sauce. *Tostones* are practically the Cuban national dish. Cubans also like to cube plantains and add them to stews, boil and purée them like mashed potatoes, or bake them with sugar and cinnamon for dessert (as in the recipe at right).

**Buying plantains.** You'll find plantains year-round at most Hispanic markets, and I've often spied them in supermarkets. If you don't see them, ask the produce manager, who can usually order them.

*Tania Sigal, who was born in Colombia, is the chef-owner of Tania's Table, a catering company in South Florida that offers menus with a Latin twist. ♦*





### Baked Plantains with Brown Sugar & Rum

*Serves four.*

These beg to be served with a scoop of vanilla or coconut ice cream on top.

**Butter or cooking spray for the pan**  
**3 plantains, fully black and soft**  
**¼ cup granulated sugar**  
**2 tablespoons dark brown sugar**  
**Large pinch ground cinnamon (optional)**  
**2 tablespoons dark rum**  
**2 tablespoons orange juice**  
**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces**

Heat the oven to 375°F and grease an 8x8-inch baking dish with butter or cooking spray. Trim the ends of the plantains and peel off the skin. Slice them on an angle to get ½-inch-thick oval slices. Layer the plantain slices in the baking dish so they overlap slightly. Sprinkle on both sugars and the cinnamon. Drizzle the rum and orange juice over the plantains and dot the butter pieces on top. Bake until the plantains are golden brown, tender, and have lost their shape a bit, 30 to 40 minutes. Let cool for at least 10 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.



### Tostones (Pan-Fried Green Plantains)

*Yields about 24 tostones; serves four as a side dish; six as an appetizer.*

Serve *tostones* with a dipping sauce: Lightly fry 3 cloves garlic, chopped, in 3 tablespoons olive oil, and then mix it with ⅓ cup fresh lime juice, maybe a dash of ground cumin, and salt and pepper to taste. Soaking the *tostones* in salt water before the final fry makes them crunchier outside and moister inside, but you can skip this step.

**3 plantains, very green and firm**  
**1 cup canola oil**  
**2 tablespoons kosher salt; more for sprinkling**  
**2 cups warm water**

Trim the ends of the plantains, cut them in half crosswise, and peel off the skin with a small knife (see the photos below). Cut each half into 1-inch rounds.

Heat a 10-inch skillet with ½ cup of the oil over medium heat. When the oil is hot (a plantain will sizzle), put five plantain pieces in the skillet; don't crowd the pan. Fry until light golden on both sides, 3 to 4 minutes per side.

Transfer the pieces with tongs or a fork to a plate lined with paper towels. Cook the remaining pieces the same way. This initial fry softens the plantains so they can be smashed.

Remove the pan from the heat but don't pour out the oil. Put a plantain round between pieces of plastic wrap. With a smooth meat pounder or the bottom of a glass, gently smash the round so it flattens but doesn't crumble; it will have uneven, ridged edges and be about ¼ inch thick. Smash the other plantains.

In a large baking dish, dissolve the salt in the warm water. Fully submerge as many smashed plantains in the dish as will fit and soak for 3 to 5 minutes, but no longer. Dry the plantains well between paper towels.

Add the remaining ½ cup oil to the reserved oil in the pan and heat on medium high (a plantain will bubble around the edges when added). Fry four or five tostones on each side until golden, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a platter lined with paper towels and immediately sprinkle with kosher salt. Continue frying the remaining rounds. Serve hot with a dipping sauce, if you like.

## How to peel a green plantain

Ripe, black plantains can be peeled like a banana, but green ones have very firm, clingy flesh, and there's a trick to peeling them. (The slightly sticky substance under the skin can irritate sensitive skin, so wear gloves

if you like.) Start by trimming the ends. To make rounds, as for *tostones*, cut the plantain in half crosswise. With a sharp paring knife, score the skin along one



or more of its ridges, being careful not to cut into the flesh, and then peel off the skin in sections.



## Some fruits and vegetables aren't *always* good for you

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

**W**e tend to think that everything “fresh and natural” is good for our health, but many fruits and vegetables that you might think of as healthful have a darker side to them, too. Being aware of both the beneficial and the toxic parts means that you won't unwittingly get caught by a plant's natural defenses.

When it comes to survival, nature means business. Plants can't run from predators like animals can. To defend themselves or their young, plants resort to chemical warfare. If you've ever cried while chopping onions, you've been the victim of it.

When you cut (or attack) an onion, chemicals that are usually locked in one part of its cells come into contact with chemicals isolated in another section, and the interaction produces a gas that irritates the eyes of animals, humans included. This can be a successful way for plants to drive away predators.

**The seeds of many plants are poisonous** to ensure the creation of the next generation. Apple seeds and the seeds inside peach and apricot pits all contain small amounts of cyanide—as few as 15 apricot seeds could kill a child. Fortunately, they're rarely eaten accidentally; still, it's wise to remove all seeds before serving. If you accidentally swallow an apple seed or two, don't worry; you'll be fine. Just don't make it a habit.

Lima beans, which are seeds, also contain a small amount of cyanide. When lima beans are

cooked, the cyanide converts into a gas and escapes harmlessly into the air, rendering the cooked beans safe to eat. You shouldn't, however, make raw lima beans part of your diet. Again, a few might be fine, but ingesting even tiny amounts of cyanide regularly can cause shortness of breath, difficulty walking, and vision and hearing problems.

Other types of beans, such as soybeans, navy beans, and black-eyed peas, can interfere with digestion if eaten raw. Enzymes in the beans (called protease inhibitors) cause chemical changes in the lining of the intestines that make it impossible for nutrients to be absorbed. The enzymes that cause these changes are killed by heat, so the beans are harmless when cooked.

**Some plants are toxic if not prepared properly.** Cassava (also called yuca and manioc), a root vegetable that is a major food source in many parts of the world, contains cyanide. In its traditional preparation—chopping or mashing followed by a resting period—enzymes in the cassava convert the cyanide into harmless compounds. As long as cassava is prepared in this way, it's a nutritious food source. Some chefs today, how-

ever, roast whole cassava in its skin like a baked potato, and in this case, trace amounts of cyanide do remain. One roasted cassava once in a while probably won't harm you, but every day, it might.

All potatoes contain harmless amounts of solanine, a toxin common to members of the nightshade family. A 7-ounce potato has about 10 milligrams of solanine, a tiny, harmless amount. But in the eyes of potatoes, the amount can jump to 200 milligrams and can cause stomach problems and neurological disorders. Also, the areas just under any greenish skin (which occurs when potatoes are exposed to light) contain high concentrations of solanine. Potatoes are perfectly safe to eat as long as you cut away the eyes and peel off at least 1/16 inch under any greenish parts.

*Shirley O. Corriher is a food scientist, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, and the author of the award-winning CookWise. ♦*

### Deadly leaves

You may have noticed that in grocery stores, fresh rhubarb stems are never sold with their leaves. This is because rhubarb leaves contain a poison that can cause organ failure—a healthy adult can die within hours after eating them. If you grow your own rhubarb (or know someone who does), be sure to remove and discard the leaves.





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## WINNING TIP

### An oven rack doubles as a pasta drying rack

I love to make fresh pasta but since I don't own a pasta drying rack, I press an oven rack into service. I just put one rack in the top position in the oven and remove the other rack. Next, I drape strands of pasta over each wire of the rack, letting the two halves hang down between the wires. Once I'm done, I push the rack back into the oven and close the door. This gives my pasta an out-of-the-way place to dry, protected from dust and pets. I also tape a note to the oven door, reminding me not to turn it on!

—Rex Browning,  
Mercer Island, Washington

### Perfectly shaped cookies every time

Moving rolled cookies after cutting can be difficult, especially if they're rolled very thin. A great solution is to roll the dough on parchment, cut the shapes, remove the scrap dough, slide the paper onto a baking sheet, and refrigerate or freeze for a few minutes to firm the cookies. The cookies can then be easily moved without distorting their shape.

—Edith C. Williams,  
Rockville, Maryland

### Convenient roasted garlic without the mess

I buy peeled, fresh garlic cloves in one-pound jars for everyday use and whole garlic bulbs for roasting. Once when I wanted roasted garlic and the local market was closed, I decided to improvise. I put a large handful (about 20) of the peeled garlic cloves on two large sheets of parchment, drizzled olive oil over them, and sprinkled them

with salt. I twisted the corners of the parchment together to create a little bundle. I set the bundle into a soaked terra-cotta garlic roaster, which I put in a 350°F oven and roasted for about 30 minutes. The advantage of using peeled garlic is that I get buttery-smooth garlic without the work and mess of separating the soft, cooked garlic from the skins.

—Debra Sue Heaphy,  
American Canyon, California

### Highlight recipe ingredients for easy shopping

As soon as my *Fine Cooking* arrives, I eagerly scan the recipes. They're laid out so clearly that only one thing can improve them. I go over each key ingredient with a yellow highlighter so I can later quickly determine if I have all the items in stock or if I must make a trip to the grocer. I do this with my cookbooks, too.

—William van Druten,  
Duluth, Minnesota

### Steam vegetables on top of cooking rice

When I'm cooking rice, I like to use the last few minutes of cooking time to steam my vegetables. I put the vegetables right on top of the partially cooked rice, put the lid back on, and let them steam together. Sliced carrots take about 20 minutes to cook, broccoli needs around 6 to 10 minutes, and sugar snap peas take less than 5 minutes. The rice and vegetables remain separate for easy serving, and I have one less pan to wash. This method works well whether the rice is cooked on the stovetop or in a rice cooker.

—Karen Olson,  
Bloomington, Minnesota

### An extra trash bin improves traffic flow in the kitchen

It's often suggested that a second sink helps ease the flow in a two-cook kitchen. In many kitchens, there's often congestion around the garbage bin,



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especially if it's built into a cabinet. We solved this problem at our house by doubling up on built-in garbage bins: one near the food prep station and one by the sink. This has greatly improved traffic flow in our kitchen, and we don't have to carry messy or wet garbage across the room.

—Theresa Mackenzie,  
St. John's, Newfoundland

## Cook squash in two steps to save time

I'm always trying to find time-saving tricks that don't reduce the quality of the finished dish. For the Roasted Acorn Squash recipe in *Fine Cooking* #49, you can prepare and assemble the squash and stuffing according to the directions, put the squash in a microwave-safe, covered container with ½ inch of water in the bottom, and microwave on high for 10 minutes (for two halves). Then move the squash to the oven to finish cooking them. You can do a doneness test once the squash are browned. This cuts the cooking time dramatically.

—Dave Boccuti,  
via e-mail

## Removing fish bones easily

To locate the pin bones from a fish fillet, you usually have to run a finger along the center of the fillet to locate them and then pluck out the bones with tweezers or needle-nose pliers. It's much easier, however, to lay the fillet, bone side up, over an upside-down mixing bowl covered with plastic wrap. The curvature of the bowl causes the pin bones to jut out, making them easier to locate and remove. If the fillet is long, simply slide it along the back of the bowl to go over the length of the fish.

—Austin Liu,  
San Leandro, California

## Keep bread dough warm in a chilly kitchen

I usually start my bread baking early in the morning, when my kitchen is at its coldest. To create a warm environment for my dough to rise, I put the kneaded dough in a covered ceramic bowl and put the bowl in my kitchen sink. I fill the sink with 100°F water until it comes about two-thirds of the way up the sides of the bowl. Using this method, I've gotten reliable risings, even on the coldest mornings.

—Steve Boyle,  
Rural Hall, North Carolina

## Removing sausage casings

Many recipes call for fresh bulk pork sausage, but it isn't always available in grocery stores. Most of the time I have to buy fresh sausage links and remove the casings. I find the best technique is to run the sausages under cold tap water for a minute or two, then slit the casings with a pair of sharp kitchen shears, and remove the sausage meat, which will come away cleanly from the casings. The cold water softens the casings and causes the sausage fat to harden and congeal around the meat, preventing it from sticking.

—Mary Malensek,  
Sagamore Hills, Ohio

## Dried lasagna helps thicken sauces

When I need to reduce a large amount of sauce and time is short, I'll throw in a piece of dried lasagna noodle to help absorb the excess liquid. The pasta will absorb liquid without giving the sauce a pasty or floury flavor, which can happen if you use a lot of flour or cornstarch as



a thickener. Discard the noodle once the sauce reaches the right consistency. Similarly, sliced sun-dried tomatoes (not packed in oil) or dehydrated mushrooms also work well to help absorb excess liquid, plus they add flavor to the sauce.

—Chuck Langman,  
Ambler, Pennsylvania

## Nonstick spray without the mess

When spraying a skillet, cookie sheet, or pan for baking, hold it over the open door of your dishwasher. This way, there will be no greasy mist on the sink, stove-top, or counter to clean.

—Lilia Dvarionas,  
Ottawa, Ontario

## Quick parchment rounds

When I make a parchment round for my cake pan, I avoid the tedious step of outlining the pan with a pencil and then cutting the parchment. Instead, I put a cake pan on a large sheet of parchment on a cutting board and run the point of a sharp pair of scissors (or a box cutter or craft knife) around the outside edge of the pan to score the parchment. Then I separate the parchment round from the rest of the sheet. I have a perfect round for my cake pan, and I avoid getting pencil "lead" in my baked goods.

—Diana Almeida,  
via e-mail ♦



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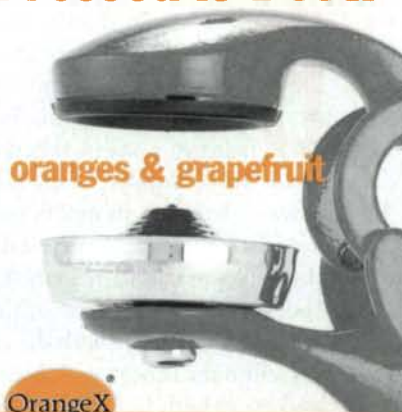


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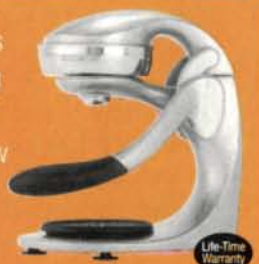
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# Shortcut Chicken

## A trick or two gives slow-cooked

BY TONY ROSENFELD



### author's tip

Puréeing some of the vegetables and cooking liquid produces a full-bodied sauce, and it's quicker than long, slow reducing.

**B**efore I could identify the different parts of a chicken or knew how to cook them, I found myself, a 20-year-old in Spain, shrinking in front of a stern-faced butcher, ticket #87 crumpled in my hand and a wave of irritable shoppers pushing up against my back. I ordered chicken thighs, *contramuslos* in Spanish, because they were the cheapest option. After stewing the chicken with the entirety of my culinary repertoire (bacon, wine, and every herb I could find), I decided the meaty, flavorful thighs—seemingly immune from drying out—were my kind of food: cheap, tasty, and forgiving.

I still gravitate to chicken thighs when I crave something substantial and easy in the winter.

They hold up well to all sorts of preparations, particularly stews. I brown the thighs and then stew them with aromatic vegetables, spices, and chicken broth. To create a full-bodied sauce (without a long, slow reduction), I purée some of the vegetables and cooking liquid. The

whole process comes to about an hour or so of active cooking; not your standard throw-everything-in-the-pot-and-walk-away stew, but quick enough for weeknight meals, and appealingly rustic for casual entertaining.

**For stewing, skinless bone-in thighs are foolproof.** Selecting bone-in chicken thighs for stewing is an easy decision.

The thigh bone helps keep the chicken moist, making the flavorful thighs even harder to overcook.

I also opt to cook the thighs without the skin. In stews, it's impossible to keep chicken skin crisp, even if it's browned sufficiently beforehand. The stewed skin takes on an unappealing soggy texture, and since it renders fat during cooking, the stew would have to be skimmed—an unwanted extra step. To make up for any loss of flavor by not using the skin, I only trim off large pieces of fat from the thighs. The remaining untrimmed fat will melt off during cooking and give the sauce a touch of richness.

**Purée the vegetables for a “stewy” texture.** I look to a blender, not slow cooking, to produce a thick, stewy consistency in the sauce. After browning the chicken thighs, I make a caramelized vegetable broth by sautéing onions and garlic in the flavorful browned fat left behind by the chicken. I add chicken broth and some sort of starch, like potatoes or beans, to the caramel-

ized onions and simmer until the vegetables soften. Then I purée about half of the mixture in a blender and mix it back into the rest of the broth, and this gives the dish that substantial stewy texture I want. I return the browned thighs to the now-thickened sauce and simmer them until they enrich the sauce and the meat is cooked through.

### 3 steps to a shortcut stew

- ❖ Brown the chicken thighs for rich, caramelized flavor.
- ❖ Braise the vegetables in chicken broth and purée for a silky texture.
- ❖ Stew the chicken in the broth until cooked through.



# Stews

flavor in less time



## Chicken Cacciatore with Sautéed Mushrooms & Zucchini

*Serves four to six.*

Canned tomatoes give this stew a chunky, full texture, so I don't purée the vegetables as I do in the other stews (see the results of our blind tomato tasting on p. 74). Serve the stew over white rice, if you like.

**6 skinless, bone-in chicken thighs (about 2¼ pounds), large pieces of fat trimmed**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**1 large red onion, finely diced**  
**½ red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and diced**  
**2 cloves garlic, smashed**  
**½ cup dry red wine (like Chianti)**  
**1 can (28 ounces) whole peeled tomatoes**  
**2 sprigs fresh thyme, plus 1 teaspoon chopped**  
**2 small sprigs fresh rosemary**

**Pinch crushed red chile flakes**  
**1 medium zucchini, quartered lengthwise and sliced into ¼-inch pieces**  
**½ pound white mushrooms, cleaned and thinly sliced**  
**½ cup pitted mixed green and black olives, quartered**  
**3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley; more for garnish**

Season the chicken well with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy soup pot over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add half the thighs and brown them well, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a large plate. Brown the remaining thighs and reserve with the rest.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the onion, red pepper, and garlic. Season generously

with salt and cook, stirring often with a wooden spoon and scraping up any browned bits, until the onion softens and browns, about 12 minutes. Turn the heat to high, add the wine, and cook until it's almost completely reduced, about 2 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium and add the tomatoes and their juices, the thyme sprigs, rosemary, and chile flakes. Nestle the chicken into the sauce and add any accumulated juices. Cook, stirring and breaking up the tomatoes with a wooden spoon for 10 minutes. Adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer, cover the pot with the lid slightly ajar, and stew the chicken, turning it occasionally, until it's cooked through (check by slicing through the bottom of one of the thighs to the bone), another

25 to 30 minutes. If you like, discard the thyme sprigs, rosemary, and garlic.

When the stew is almost done, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large skillet over high heat. When hot, add the zucchini. Season well with salt and pepper; sauté until the zucchini is tender and lightly browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. Heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil in the skillet and add the mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper. Cook, tossing occasionally, until soft and lightly browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the olives and chopped thyme, return the zucchini to the pan, and toss. Fold the zucchini mixture and the parsley into the stew. Taste for salt and pepper. Serve immediately with a sprinkling of parsley.





## Southwestern Spiced Chicken & Black Bean Stew

*Serves four to six.*

It's well worth the effort to find a dried chipotle, which gives the broth a wonderful smoky spice (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 76). To make fried tortilla strips, cut corn or flour tortillas into long strips and fry in 350°F oil until they start to brown, about 2 minutes.

**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**3 thick slices bacon**  
**6 skinless, bone-in chicken thighs (about 2¼ pounds), large pieces of fat trimmed**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 large yellow onion, diced**  
**1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and finely diced**  
**2 teaspoons chili powder**  
**1 teaspoon ground cumin**  
**¾ cup beer**

**1 can (15½ ounces) black beans, rinsed (about 2 cups)**  
**1 dried chipotle (optional)**  
**2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth; more if needed**  
**3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves**  
**1 lime**  
**Sour cream for garnish**  
**Fried tortilla strips (optional)**

Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy pot over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until it renders much of its fat and crisps slightly, about 7 minutes. Transfer the bacon to a plate lined with paper towels. Season the chicken well with salt and pepper. Add half of the thighs to the pan and brown them well on both sides, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate. Brown the remaining thighs and reserve with the rest.

There should be 2 to 3 tablespoons fat left in the pan; if there's more, spoon out and discard the excess. Add the onion and bell pepper, season well with salt, and cook, stirring often, until the onion softens and caramelizes slightly, about 7 minutes. Raise the heat to high, add the chili powder and cumin, and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the beer and cook until

it's almost completely reduced, about 3 minutes. Add the beans, the chipotle (if using), and the chicken broth. When the mixture comes to a boil, adjust the heat to maintain a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Transfer 2 cups of the beans and broth (but not the chipotle) to a blender, purée, and then mix it back into the rest of the broth.

Return the thighs to the pot, cover with the lid slightly ajar, and simmer until the chicken is cooked through (check by slicing through the bottom of one of the thighs to the bone), about 30 minutes. If the stew is too thick, thin it with more chicken broth. Discard the chipotle. Crumble the reserved bacon. Juice one half of the lime; cut the other half into wedges. Stir the bacon, lime juice, and 2 tablespoons of the cilantro into the stew and season well with salt and pepper. Serve immediately, ladling some of the beans and chicken into each bowl. Sprinkle each serving with the remaining cilantro and a small dollop of sour cream. Serve with the lime wedges and fried tortilla strips, if you like.



## drink choices

### Chicken stews need fruity reds with moderate tannins

A light, fruity red without too much tannin would be a good overall bet for these chicken stews. The 1999 Domaine de Grangeneuve Vieilles Vignes Coteaux du Tricastin (50% Syrah 50% Grenache; rings in at \$10), or the 2000 Foxen Vineyards Santa Barbara County Pinot Noir (\$24) are both delicious possibilities.

Focusing in on each specific recipe, the chicken cacciatore calls for a more substantial red with moderate tannins and bright acidity. Look to Chianti: the 2000

Piazzano Chianti "Rio Camerata" (\$11) or the 1999 Le Cinciole Chianti Classico (\$20) are two of my current favorites. The chicken thighs with sausage and braised fennel would pair well with a spicy Zinfandel. Chateau Potelle's 2000 Zin from San Luis Obispo County (\$20) fits the bill with its lush, spicy red berry fruit. I also like the 2000 vintage from Dashe Cellars of Dry Creek Valley (\$20). With the porcini and potato stew, seek out a Zinfandel that's not too high in alcohol, like Beringer Founders'

Reserve (\$11) or Peachy Canyon Incredible Red (\$12). Finally, the chicken and black bean stew does need a full-throttle, hearty red to match the intensity of flavors in the recipe. The 2001 Rosemount Shiraz-Cabernet (\$7) or the 2000 Mas Grand Plagniol Rouge Tradition, Costières de Nîmes (\$11) would work to perfection.

*Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, lives in San Francisco. Retail prices are approximate.*



## Chicken Stew with Spinach, Potatoes & Porcini

*Serves four to six.*

Be sure to buy good-quality dried porcini mushrooms (with large white cross sections). Cheaper ones are dark and shriveled and have an overly pungent aroma, which will give the stew an off taste.

**½ ounce dried porcini mushrooms**

**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**2 slices (⅛ inch thick) pancetta or bacon (about 2 ounces), sliced into thin strips**

**6 skinless, bone-in chicken thighs (about 2¼ pounds), large pieces of fat trimmed**

**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**1 large yellow onion, cut into ¼-inch dice**

**2 small cloves garlic, minced**

**¼ cup dry sherry or dry white wine**

**2 large Yukon Gold potatoes (1 pound total), peeled and cut into ½-inch dice**

**2 sprigs fresh thyme, plus**

**1½ teaspoons chopped**

**1½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth; more if needed**

**2 tablespoons sherry vinegar or balsamic vinegar**

**1 cup coarse fresh bread-crumbs (about 1½ ounces)**

**2 cups baby spinach leaves (about 2 ounces)**

Soak the porcini in 1½ cups boiling water for 20 minutes. Strain them (reserving the soaking liquid) and chop them.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy soup pot over medium heat. Add the pancetta or bacon and cook, stirring occasionally, until crisp, about 7 minutes; transfer to a plate lined with paper towels. Season the chicken well with salt and pepper. Add half of the thighs to the pan and brown them well, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a large plate.



Brown the remaining thighs and reserve with the rest.

Add the onion and half of the garlic to the pan and season well with salt. Cook, stirring with a wooden spoon and scraping up any browned bits, until the onion softens and darkens slightly, about 7 minutes. Add the chopped porcini and cook for another 1 minute. Pour in the sherry and cook, stirring occasionally, until it's almost completely reduced, about 2 minutes. Add the potatoes, thyme sprigs,

chicken broth, reserved porcini water, and vinegar and bring to a boil over high heat. Adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer, cover the pan, and cook until the potatoes are just tender, about 15 minutes. Discard the thyme sprigs. Purée 1½ cups of the chunky potato mixture in a blender. Return the puréed mixture to the rest of the broth, nestle in the chicken (and add any accumulated juices), and cover the pot with the lid slightly ajar. Stew the chicken thighs at a bare simmer, turning them occasionally, until they're cooked through (check by slicing through the bottom of one of the thighs to the bone), about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a large non-stick skillet, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil over medium heat. Add the remaining garlic, sauté until it starts to color, about 20 seconds, and then add the breadcrumbs. Cook, stirring often, until they turn golden brown, about 6 minutes. Stir in ½ teaspoon of the chopped thyme, season lightly with salt and pepper, and transfer to a plate lined with paper towels.

When the chicken is done, fold in the spinach and stir until wilted, about 1 minute. Stir in the remaining 1 teaspoon chopped thyme and the pancetta; season well with salt and pepper. Serve immediately, sprinkled generously with the breadcrumbs.







Use a sharp peeler to shave thin slices of fennel. Start peeling on the inside of the bulb, using long, smooth strokes.

## Chicken Thighs with Sausage & Braised Fennel

*Serves four to six.*

- 1 large or 2 small bulbs fresh fennel (about 1 pound), with stalks attached, if possible**
- 6 skinless, bone-in chicken thighs (about 2¼ pounds), large pieces of fat trimmed**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 links sweet Italian sausage (about ¾ pound)**
- 1 large yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced**
- 1 clove garlic, minced**
- ½ cup dry white wine (like Sauvignon Blanc)**
- 1½ to 2½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- 1 large Yukon Gold potato (about ½ pound), peeled and cut into ½-inch dice**
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary**
- 1 tablespoon good-quality balsamic vinegar; more if needed**
- ⅓ cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano; more for sprinkling**

Cut the stalks off the fennel. If there are any fronds, save a small handful. Quarter the fennel bulb through its core; reserve one quarter (two if using small bulbs). Slice the remaining fennel through the core into wedges about ½ inch thick.

Season the chicken well with salt and pepper. Heat 3 tablespoons of the oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy soup pot over medium-high heat. Add half of the thighs and brown them well, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a large plate. Add the remaining thighs and the sausage to the pot, brown them, and reserve with the first batch of thighs.

Reduce the heat to medium, add the fennel wedges and onion, and season well with salt. Cook, stirring often until the onion softens completely and caramelizes slightly, about 10 minutes. Push the fennel and onion to one side of the pot, add 1 teaspoon of oil to

the pot and sauté the garlic in the oil for 20 seconds. Stir it into the vegetable mixture, turn the heat to high, and add the wine. Cook, scraping the bottom of the pan, until the wine is almost completely reduced, about 2 minutes. Add 1½ cups of the chicken broth, the potato, and the rosemary. When the mixture reaches a boil, reduce the heat to medium low and cover the pot. Simmer until the potato is just tender, about 15 minutes. Transfer 1½ cups of the vegetables and broth to a blender, purée, and then mix it back into the rest of the broth. If the sauce is too thick, thin it with some of the remaining 1 cup broth. Nestle the chicken into the sauce, add any accumulated juices, cover the pot with the lid slightly ajar, and adjust the heat to maintain a low simmer. Slice the sausages into 1-inch pieces. After the chicken has been stewing for 15 minutes, add the sausage pieces.

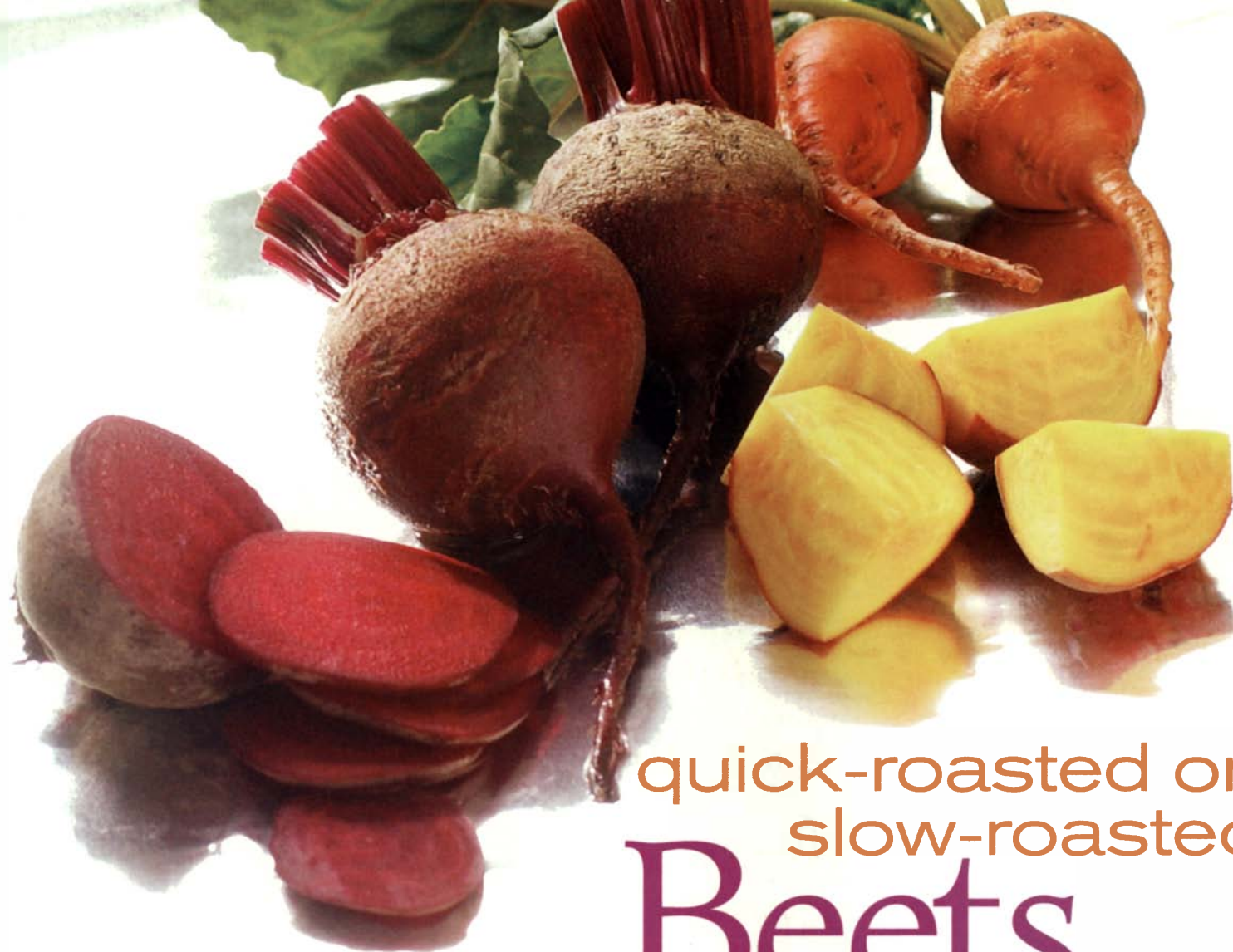
Cover partially and simmer gently, stirring occasionally, until the chicken and sausage are cooked through (check by slicing into each), another 15 to 20 minutes. Discard the rosemary.

Meanwhile, use a sharp vegetable peeler to shave the remaining fennel and put it in a small bowl. Season well with salt and pepper. Finely chop 1 to 2 tablespoons of the reserved fennel fronds (save the rest) and add to the shaved fennel along with the remaining 1 teaspoon oil. Toss well and taste for seasoning.

Stir the balsamic vinegar and Parmigiano into the stew; taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve, ladling a portion of chicken, sausage, and sauce into each bowl. Sprinkle each serving with more Parmigiano and mound a small portion of fennel salad and the reserved fennel fronds over it.

*Tony Rosenfeld is an associate editor for Fine Cooking.* ♦





# quick-roasted or slow-roasted Beets

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON

## ideas for beets

Serve roasted beets simply, with or without a squeeze of lemon or a dash of vinegar. Or use them in other dishes, like the recipes on pp. 42-43, or in the ideas below:

- ❖ Sir-fry tender greens like spinach or watercress with chopped fresh ginger and garlic. Add roasted beet slices or wedges to the pan; deglaze with a little orange juice and cider vinegar. Serve warm.
- ❖ Arrange a bed of roasted beet slices and top with a bit of really good blue cheese and a seared filet mignon.
- ❖ Marinate roasted beet wedges in a mix of orange and lemon juice, fresh thyme, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Serve on a bed of arugula, garnished with toasted hazelnuts.

**L**earning to love beets isn't nearly as hard as you might imagine, because a *roasted* beet isn't so much a beet as it is a sweet and tender roasted vegetable. If you like roasted carrots or roasted onions or even roasted potatoes, you owe it to yourself to roast a beet. You don't even have to peel them; sliced or cut into wedges, beets just need a hot oven to turn crisp and caramelized at the edges, tender and moist in the middle.

**When I need instant gratification, I slice beets very thinly and "quick-roast" them on a baking sheet.** Tossed in a bit of olive oil, salt, and herbs first, these beautiful morsels caramelize in less than 25 minutes in high heat. I try not to eat all of them right off the baking sheet (though I can't resist the really thin ones

that turn into chips) since they're a great base for a salad or a side dish (see the box at left).

**But when I have time, I slow-roast bigger wedges of beets in lower heat.** I wrap the wedges in foil (so trapped steam helps cook them through), but they still caramelize in their own juices where they're in contact with the hot pan. These hearty beets are great to make ahead, since they're terrific warm or cold, dressed in vinaigrettes or warm dressings and mounded on platters to serve family-style or as part of a buffet. Whatever method you choose, remember to give beets a little acid—they love vinegar, lemon juice, and orange juice—and even tangy-creamy additions like goat cheese, crème fraîche and horseradish sauce to balance their intense sweetness. (*Recipes follow*)

## Quick-Roasted Beet Slices

*Serves four as a small side dish.*



- 1 pound small or medium red or yellow beets, scrubbed but not peeled**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt**
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves**

Heat the oven to 450°F. Cover two large rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Slice off the tops and bottoms of the beets and then slice the beets into

rounds as thin as possible (⅛ inch thick is ideal). If your beets are large and tough, cut them in half first, lay them on their sides, and cut half moons instead of rounds for safer cutting. Toss the slices well with the olive oil, salt, and thyme and spread them in one layer, with a little space between each, on the two baking sheets. Roast for 20 to 25 minutes, swapping

the pans to opposite racks halfway through. The beets will be soft and shrunken, slightly glistening on top and dark around the edges. The thinnest slices will be crisp and almost burned around the edges.

**To reheat:** Spread the slices on a parchment-lined baking sheet and heat in a 350°F oven for about 5 minutes.

## Frisly Lettuce Salad on a Bed of Beets with Lemon-Walnut Vinaigrette

*Serves four as a starter salad.*

- 1 recipe Quick-Roasted Beet Slices (above), at room temperature**
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon Lemon-Walnut Vinaigrette (at right); more if desired**
- 1½ ounces fresh goat cheese, crumbled into small pieces**
- ¼ cup toasted walnuts, roughly chopped into small but not fine pieces**
- 2 cups torn frisée, washed and dried**
- 1 cup tender watercress sprigs, washed and dried**
- ¾ cup (about ¼ head) thinly sliced radicchio**

Arrange equal portions of the roasted beet slices in one layer on four salad plates. Drizzle a scant 1 teaspoon of the vinaigrette over the beets. Sprinkle the goat cheese over each plate of beets. Sprinkle all but 1 tablespoon of the walnuts over each of the four plates as well. In a small mixing bowl, combine the frisée, watercress, and radicchio. Drizzle 2 tablespoons of the vinaigrette over the greens and toss lightly. (Taste a piece of lettuce; if you want more dressing, toss just a small amount more with the greens, but don't overdress.) Lift a quarter of the greens and arrange them in a tall mound centered on top of the beets (some of the beets should be peeking out underneath) on one plate; repeat with the remaining greens. Sprinkle the remaining walnuts over each salad and serve right away.



## Lemon-Walnut Vinaigrette

*Yields a generous ⅓ cup.*

- 2 tablespoons walnut oil**
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar**
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped lemon zest**
- 2½ teaspoons fresh lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped toasted walnuts**
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves**

- ¼ teaspoon dry mustard**
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt**
- About 6 grinds black pepper**

Measure all the ingredients into a small glass jar with a tight-fitting lid. Screw on the lid and shake the contents vigorously. The vinaigrette keeps in the refrigerator for a week. Bring to room temperature and shake vigorously again before using.



## Slow-Roasted Beet Wedges

*Serves four as a side dish.*

**1 pound small or medium red or yellow beets, scrubbed but not peeled**  
**1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil**  
**½ teaspoon kosher salt**  
**5 small sprigs fresh thyme or rosemary**

Heat the oven to 400°F. Measure two 2-foot lengths of aluminum foil and crisscross them on a small rimmed baking sheet. Slice the tops and bottoms off the beets. Cut the beets into wedges from top to bottom (small beets may only need to be quartered; cut larger beets in half horizontally first, then cut each half into about 6 wedges). Each wedge should be about 1½ inches at its widest point. Toss the beets well with the olive

oil and salt and put them, in one layer, on the cross section of foil on the baking sheet. Group them snugly but in one layer. Lay the herb sprigs on top of the beets and close the package tightly by folding each sheet of foil in and sealing it with the others. The package should be flat and relatively airtight.

Roast the beets for 1½ hours. Remove them from the oven and, avoiding the steam, carefully peel back the foil. Check to see that the beets are cooked through (a thin knife should slide through without resistance). Also check that the bottoms of the beets are nicely caramelized (they should be darkened and wrinkled). If they're not done, seal the package again and

return the beets to the oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Depending on the heat of your oven, the thickness of your baking sheet, and the size of the wedges, they may take more or less time.

**To reheat:** Spread the wedges on a baking sheet and heat in a 350°F oven for about 10 minutes.

### **Variation: Slow-Roasted Beets & Shallots**

Add 5 or 6 large peeled shallots, cut in half or quartered into wedges through the stem (keep the stem intact), to the beets before roasting, and toss with the oil. Roasting time will be slightly longer because of the moisture the shallots give off.



## **Warm Roasted Beets & Shallots with Crisp Prosciutto Dressing**

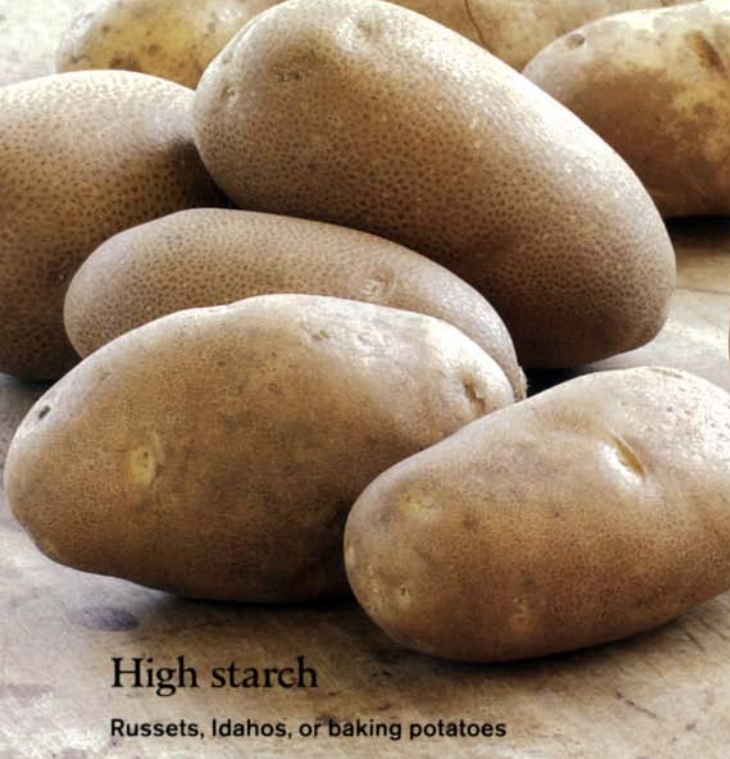
*Serves four as a side dish.*

**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**  
**2 ounces thinly sliced domestic prosciutto, cut into thin strips**  
**1 clove garlic, thinly sliced**  
**1½ tablespoons sherry vinegar**  
**Kosher salt to taste**  
**Pinch dried red chile flakes**  
**1 recipe Slow-Roasted Beets & Shallots (see the recipe variation above), warm**  
**15 large mint leaves, thinly sliced (1 heaping tablespoon)**

Heat the olive oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add the prosciutto and sauté until crisp and browned in places, 2 to 3 minutes; transfer with a slotted spoon to paper towels. Turn the heat down to medium low and add the garlic slices; sauté until translucent and barely turning golden, 30 to 60 seconds. Add the vinegar, a big pinch of salt, and a few red chile flakes. Stir and remove the pan from the heat. Leave the dressing in the pan and reheat just before the beets come out of the oven. Add the warm beets and shallots to the pan and toss to coat. Reserving a little of each for garnish, toss the mint and prosciutto into the pan with the beets, stir again, and taste for salt. Turn the beets out onto a small platter and top with the remaining mint and prosciutto.

*Susie Middleton is the executive editor of Fine Cooking.* ♦



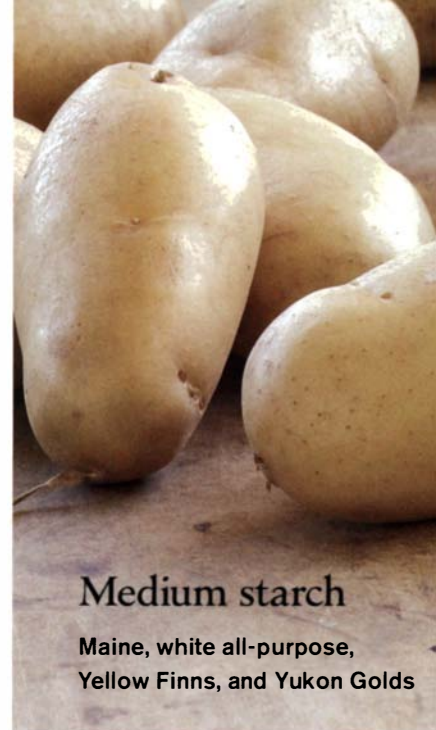


## High starch

Russets, Idahos, or baking potatoes

## Fluffy

High-starch potatoes make the fluffiest, lightest mashed potatoes and happily absorb all the cream and butter you care to add. A ricer is the ultimate tool for entirely lump-free, light, and fluffy mashed potatoes.



## Medium starch

Maine, white all-purpose, Yellow Finns, and Yukon Golds



## Ricer

## Creamy

Medium-starch potatoes make a mash that's a bit denser than high-starch potatoes but is still smooth and light. Our favorites, Yukon Golds, often need less butter and other enrichments since they're intrinsically creamy. We rely on the old stand-by, a hand masher, for these kinds of potatoes.

# Mashing Potatoes

BY ROY FINAMORE  
& MOLLY STEVENS

**F**or classic, fluffy mashed potatoes, there's just one potato for the job—russets. But that doesn't mean classic is the only mash or that russets are your only option. You can mash with yellow potatoes, or red-skinned potatoes, or just about any potato. But to do so with success—and not end up with a gluey, gloppy mess—it's helpful to have the right tool for the potatoes at hand and to know a few important techniques. Regardless of the type of potato

or the type of mash you're after, the first few steps are always the same.

### **For quick, even cooking, cut potatoes into pieces and simmer—don't boil**

Begin by peeling the potatoes (unless you're making the smashed red-skinned ones) and cutting them into large chunks. True, a potato boiled in its jacket will absorb less water during cooking, but then you have to play hot potato, peeling it while it's steaming. The key





## Smashed

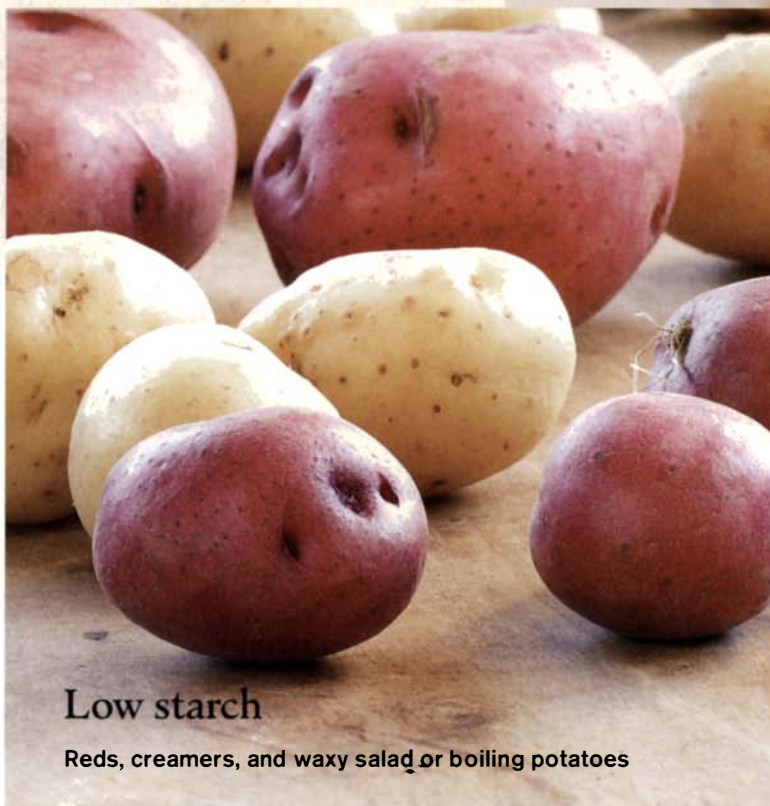
Low-starch potatoes will turn gummy if you try to make a classic mash. A big metal spoon is the best tool for making smashed potatoes where you want to retain texture and lumps.



Spoon



Masher



Low starch

Reds, creamers, and waxy salad or boiling potatoes

# to Perfection

is to mash the potatoes while they're as hot as possible. Besides, there's a trick for drying them that we'll get to later.

Start the potatoes in a generous amount of cold water, and be sure to add salt at the outset or they'll never be quite as tasty as they should. When the water boils, lower the heat to a steady simmer, covering the pot partially to maintain an even temperature. Don't let the water boil vigorously or the potatoes will bang around, break up, and get waterlogged.

The best way to know when a potato is done is to stick it with a thin metal skewer. (A fork will poke the potato full of holes and invite water in.) A potato is tender enough to mash when the skewer slides into the center with no resistance and slides out just as easily. You don't want the potatoes falling apart, but if they're too firm in the center, you'll have hard bits in the mash.

Waterlogged potatoes make a dense, soggy mash, so here's the trick for drying

them out: After you drain them, put them back in the empty pot and set it over medium heat; shake the pot and stir the potatoes with a wooden spoon so they don't stick. They'll break up a bit and become noticeably drier, brighter, and more starchy looking. Medium- and high-starch potatoes will leave a floury film in the pot when they're dry enough.

For really great classic mashed potatoes, we reach for the ricer. It's a bit more trouble

than a hand masher, but it makes the lightest, smoothest mashed potatoes ever.

You can get good results with a hand masher as long as you're methodical. Start mashing by pressing down firmly and steadily at the 12 o'clock position in the pot and then move just slightly clockwise to 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, and so on, until you've worked your way around the pot. If there are unmashed potatoes in the center, give them a mash, too. Repeat the circle, pressing with a bit more energy and giving the masher a little twist as you press. As the potatoes start to come together, work the masher even more quickly, almost like a whisk, and whip the potatoes into a smooth mass. Be sure to get to all corners of the pot, and keep going until the potatoes are as smooth as you want.

Low-starch, waxy salad or boiling potatoes are best coarsely "smashed." A big metal spoon is the best tool to get this job done.

### Use a wooden spoon to beat in enrichments

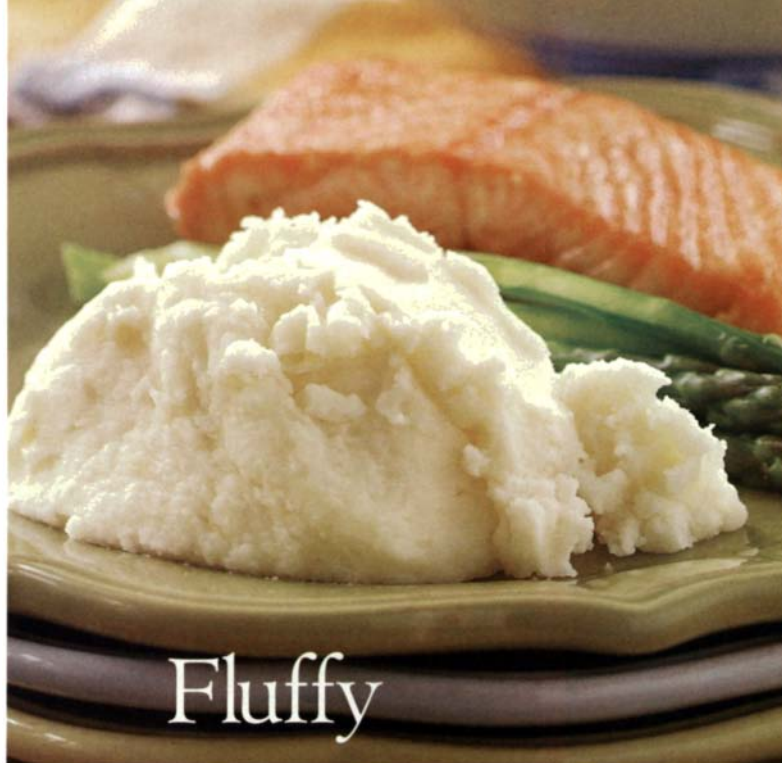
If you want perfectly smooth mashed potatoes, then get them completely mashed before you start adding enrichments like butter, cheese, or milk. (Lumps somehow manage to elude the masher once you add liquid and fat to the potatoes.) We like to beat in enrichments with a sturdy wooden spoon. This last step really fluffs the mash and ensures that the ingredients are evenly distributed.

When it's time to add ingredients, be sure they're warm or at room temperature so they don't cool the potatoes and make them stiff. Butter should be soft but not oily. Cheeses and olive oil should be at room temperature. And the liquid—milk, cream, or potato water—has to be hot (a microwave is handy).

Butter or olive oil goes in first. Then add the liquid in small additions, no more than ¼ cup at a time. This lets you best judge how much you need—potatoes vary in how thirsty they are. And remember to beat the potatoes as you go so they come out extra fluffy.



*Put the drained potatoes back in the pot to dry them. They're ready for mashing when they leave a floury film in the pot.*



### Ultimate Fluffy Mashed Potatoes

*Serves four to six.*

For the fluffiest result, use a ricer, though these rich potatoes are still delicious made with a hand masher. The crème fraîche adds a nice tang, making a tasty side dish for something hearty and almost sweet—like the pot roast on p. 70. If you can't find crème fraîche (many supermarkets carry it in the specialty cheese section), use a mix of heavy cream and sour cream.

**1¼ to 2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks (1½ to 2 inches)**

**Kosher salt**

**1 cup crème fraîche (or ½ cup heavy cream plus ½ cup sour cream)**

**1 teaspoon grated lemon zest**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**

**Freshly ground white pepper**

Put the potatoes in a large saucepan and cover with cold water by at least an inch. Add a generous ½ teaspoon salt and bring to a boil. Lower

the heat to maintain a steady simmer, cover the pot partially, and cook until the potatoes are quite tender when tested with a metal skewer, 15 to 20 minutes.

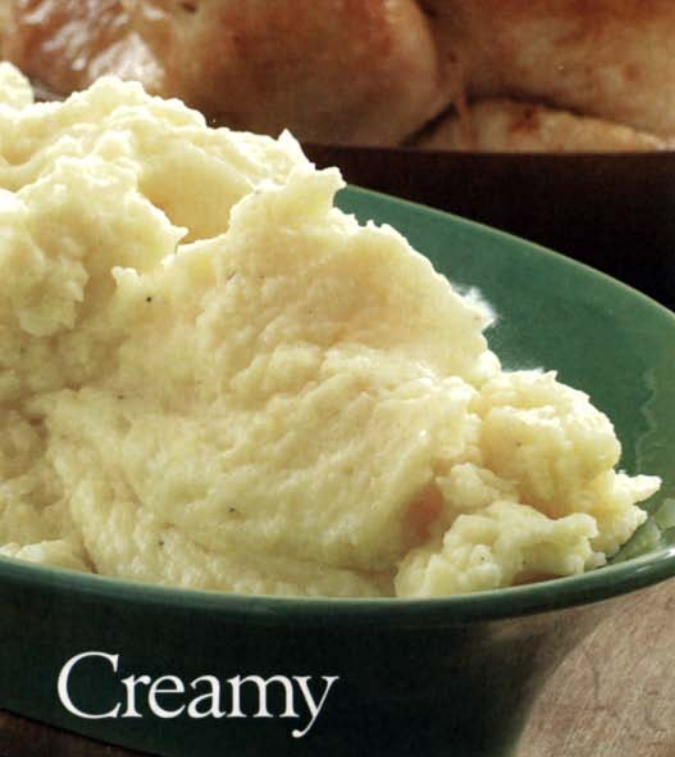
Meanwhile, heat the crème fraîche (or heavy cream and sour cream) in a small saucepan over low heat, stirring occasionally, until smooth and just hot. Set aside in a warm spot.

Drain the potatoes and dump them back into the pan. Dry the potatoes over medium heat, shaking the pan and stirring until the potatoes look floury and leave a light film on the bottom of the pan.

If using a ricer, dump the potatoes into a bowl and then rice them back into the pot set over very low heat. If using a hand masher, mash them in the pot until completely smooth.

Using a wooden spoon, beat in the lemon zest and butter. Add the crème fraîche in small additions, about ¼ cup at a time, beating well after each addition. Season with salt and pepper and serve right away.





## Creamy

### **Creamy Mashed Yukon Golds**

*Serves four to six.*

Yellow-fleshed potatoes have a rich, almost buttery taste. If you like a slightly tangy edge to your mash, substitute buttermilk for the milk. You can also embellish these by adding a whole heap of fresh herbs (up to ½ cup each of chopped parsley and basil) and some toasted pine nuts, too.

**1¾ to 2 pounds yellow-fleshed potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks (1½ to 2 inches)**

**2 cloves garlic, peeled**

**Kosher salt**

**3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**

**1 cup milk, hot but not boiling**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

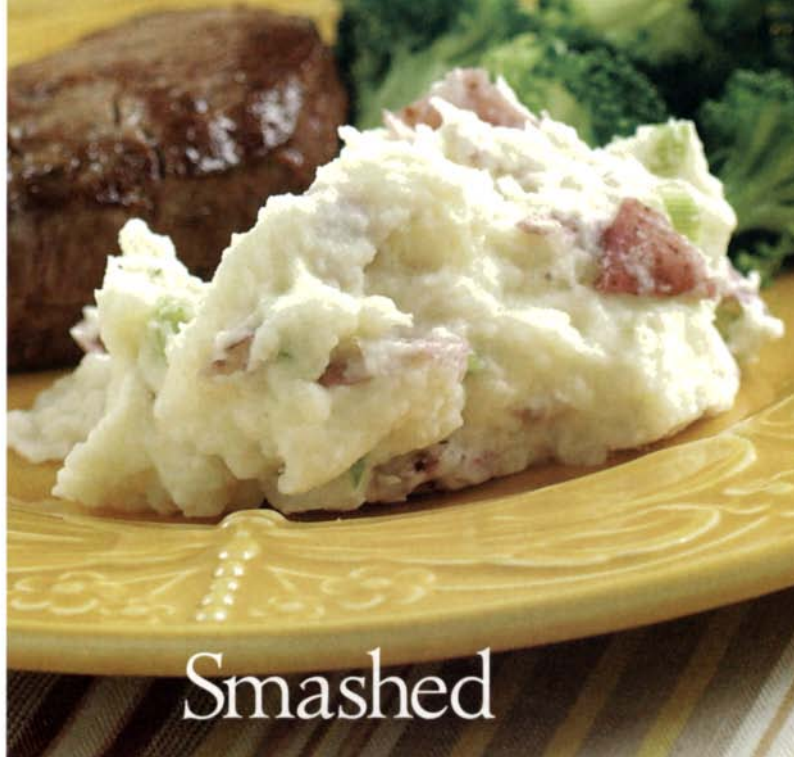
Put the potatoes and garlic in a large saucepan and cover with cold water by at least an inch. Add a generous ½ teaspoon salt and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to maintain a steady simmer, cover the pot partially, and cook until the

potatoes are quite tender when tested with a metal skewer, 15 to 20 minutes.

Drain the potatoes and garlic—reserving some of the cooking water—and dump them back into the pan. Dry the potatoes over medium heat, shaking the pan and stirring until the potatoes look floury and leave a light film on the bottom of the pan.

If using a ricer, dump the potatoes into a bowl and then rice them back into the pot set over very low heat. If using a hand masher, mash them in the pot until completely smooth.

Using a wooden spoon, beat in the butter and then beat in the hot milk in ¼-cup increments. If the potatoes are still too thick, beat in a bit of the cooking water until they reach the consistency you want. Season well with salt and pepper and serve right away.



## Smashed

### **Smashed Red-Skinned Potatoes with Boursin & Scallions**

*Serves four to six.*

Smashing low-starch potatoes into a rustic side dish is the way to go to avoid gumminess. Besides, don't we all know someone who loves lumps? If you can find it, try substituting Gorgonzola dolce for the Boursin. Gorgonzola dolce is soft and yellowish ivory with greenish-blue striations; it's much less overbearing than the white, crumbly Gorgonzola typically sold in supermarkets.

**1¾ to 2 pounds red-skinned potatoes, scrubbed and cut into large chunks (1½ to 2 inches)**

**Kosher salt**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces and softened**

**4 ounces Boursin cheese (with garlic and herbs), cut into pieces and at room temperature**

**3 scallions (white parts with some green), chopped**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

Put the potatoes in a large saucepan and cover with cold water by at least an inch. Add a generous ½ teaspoon salt and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to maintain a steady simmer, cover the pot partially, and cook until the potatoes are quite tender when tested with a metal skewer, 15 to 20 minutes.

Drain the potatoes—reserving some of the cooking water—and dump them back in the pot. Dry the potatoes over medium heat, shaking the pan and stirring, until most of the moisture has steamed off. Reduce the heat to very low.

Use the side of a big metal spoon to cut through the skins and flesh of the potatoes, reducing the chunks to a very coarse mash. Stir in the butter and then the Boursin. If you want, loosen the mash with cooking water: Depending on the potatoes, you might need a few tablespoons cooking water or as much as ½ cup. Don't beat vigorously or the potatoes may turn gummy. Stir in the scallions, add salt and pepper to taste, and serve right away.



# An Easygoing Morning Menu

Comforting, homey food—with a few neat twists—is a great way to entertain weekend guests

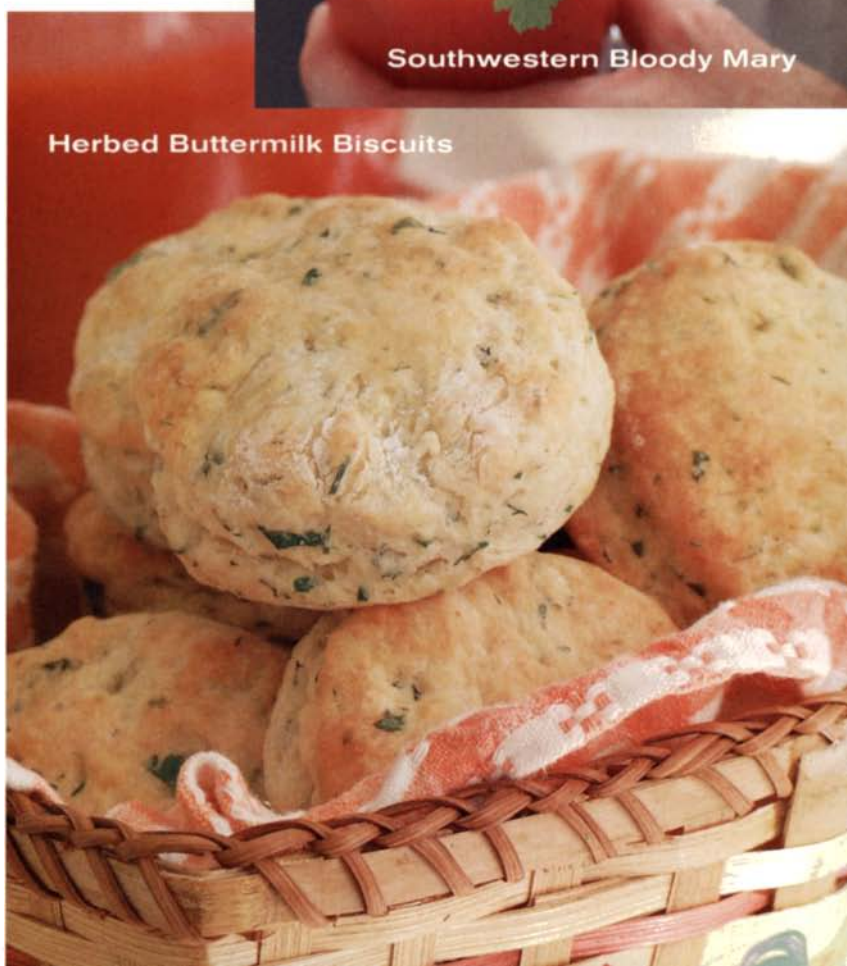
BY CHERYL ALTERS JAMISON & BILL JAMISON

**A**mong the many ways to treat ourselves and our friends to something special, our first choice is usually a real breakfast. We like massages, too, and skiing, and hiking in the Santa Fe foothills, but nothing lifts our spirits or says “we’re glad you’re here” as easily and quickly as a full-on breakfast with its homey and familiar flavors.

We start with an invigorating fruit or vegetable drink that’s just a little bit zingy, like the Southwestern Bloody Mary on p. 50, which is good with or without the vodka. (Not everyone, we know, is ready for something that strong in the morning.) Our favorite entrée is a hearty hash crowned with an egg. Skillet-crusted potatoes meet their highest breakfast destiny in a good hash, and the salmon version on p. 51 is a bit



Southwestern Bloody Mary



Herbed Buttermilk Biscuits





Salmon Hash with Dilled Crème Fraîche



Broiled Grapefruit

## timeline

### The night before

Make and chill the dilled crème fraîche.

Assemble the dry ingredients for the biscuits.

Assemble and chill the topping for the grapefruit.

Cook the salmon for the hash and refrigerate it.

### Early that morning

Mix the base for the Bloody Marys.

Heat the oven for the biscuits and mix the dough.

While the dough rests, assemble the ingredients for the hash.

Cut the biscuits and arrange them on a baking sheet.

### Thirty minutes before serving

Begin cooking the hash. After about 15 minutes, pop the biscuits in the oven.

Be sure the grapefruit topping is at room temperature.

Cook the eggs (if using) just as you're finishing the hash (the hash can sit for up to 10 minutes or so), and assemble the hash and eggs on plates.

### During breakfast or when the table is being cleared

Put the topping on the grapefruit halves and flash them under the broiler.



more elegant than corned beef or ham. It wouldn't be an American home breakfast, of course, without biscuits. And finally, a breakfast-style dessert of gently sweetened and spiced broiled grapefruit rounds out the menu.

**Use a heavy-duty pan for well-browned hash.** A well-seasoned cast-iron skillet is our pan of choice here. If you don't have one, use the best heavy-based pan you can find. We like to use a medium- to low-starch potato, like Yukon Gold, because it will hold its shape better as the hash cooks and you move it around the skillet. For even cooking and the best consistency, cut the ingredients into pieces of about the same size.

As for the biscuits, the dough will be sticky and shaggy, and you may be tempted to knead it a few extra seconds. Don't—it's important to stop kneading as soon as the dough comes together, as overhandling it will make the biscuits less tender.

**It's the first meal of the day, so chances are your guests will be hungry.** Whether you're cooking for overnight guests or a breakfast party, this is why entertaining at breakfast is different from later in the day. You don't have the luxury of doing a lot of last-minute cooking while your guests are having appetizers, so being on top of your schedule is key. Coordinating this menu so you can finish everything at once is a cinch if you follow the steps on p. 49. It's also completely do-able for one cook in a single morning. But if you don't happen to be a morning person, assemble a few items the night before so you're not overwhelmed and can wake up gently.

## Breakfast for a crowd

**All the recipes in this menu are written for four, which is an easy number to double or quadruple. Here are a few tips if you're making breakfast for a crowd.**

- ❖ Use two sauté pans to make the hash so you don't crowd the pan. This way, the hash will brown adequately.
- ❖ One biscuit recipe yields eight three-inch biscuits or a dozen two-inch biscuits. The smaller you cut them, the more you'll have.
- ❖ If you're making eggs to top the hash, eggs over easy (rather than poached or sunny side up) will hold up better to waiting. See p. 71 for tips on cooking eggs.



## Spicy Southwestern Bloody Mary

*Serves four.*

We like to add a shot of vodka, but for those who might not want such a strong drink, this is delicious "virgin" style, without the alcohol. Add the adobo sauce gradually and taste the tomato juice as you season to see how zingy you want it. (Chiles in adobo sauce may stain your cutting board; freeze extra ones in zip-top bags.)

**1 quart good-quality tomato juice**  
**½ lime, cut into 4 wedges; more if you like**  
**4 ribs celery for garnish**  
**1 medium canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce (look for La Morena brand) plus**  
**1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon adobo sauce**  
**½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce; more to taste**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**4 to 6 ounces vodka**

Pour the tomato juice into a pitcher and fill four tall glasses halfway with ice. Squeeze the juice from each lime wedge into the tomato juice and then put one squeezed wedge and a celery rib into each glass. On a cutting board, halve the chile lengthwise and gently scrape out and discard the seeds. With the side of a chef's knife, smear the chile until ground into a paste. Discard any large bits of chile skin. Scrape up the remaining chile paste and whisk this and 1 teaspoon of the adobo sauce into the tomato juice. Season the juice with the Worcestershire sauce and salt and pepper; blend again. Taste and add more adobo sauce, if you like. Add the vodka, if using. Pour into the ice-filled glasses and serve.

**Fresh tomato variation:** In summer, instead of the tomato juice, use 4 pounds fresh ripe tomatoes. Core and seed the tomatoes and purée them in a blender with ¼ cup cold water until smooth. (If you want, strain the skins, but we like their added texture.)

## Salmon tips

We've called for a plain salmon fillet in the hash, cooked as simply as possible. Use whichever method you like best and cook the salmon until it's cooked through: roasted, broiled, poached, steamed, pan-seared, and even microwaved are all fine. We find roasting the most straightforward: Heat the oven to 400°F, coat the salmon with a little olive oil, season it with salt and pepper, and roast it on a rimmed baking sheet until the flesh inside has lost its deep pink color, 15 to 18 minutes.

If you don't feel like cooking salmon, hot-smoked works well, too (look for it in cryovac packages in the supermarket seafood section). We don't recommend cold-smoked fish: it's too oily and strongly flavored.



### Salmon Hash with Dilled Crème Fraîche

*Serves four.*

We love this hash for its luscious contrast of crusted potatoes and tender, moist salmon. An egg topping is the crowning touch, although it's just as good without.

FOR THE DILLED CRÈME FRAÎCHE:

**1 cup crème fraîche or sour cream**

**1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill or**

**1½ teaspoons dried dill**

**Pinch salt**

**Squeeze fresh lemon juice (optional)**

FOR THE HASH:

**1½ tablespoons unsalted butter**

**1½ tablespoons vegetable oil**

**1 pound Yukon Gold or red-skinned potatoes, unpeeled, cut into ½-inch dice**

**½ medium onion, diced (about 1 cup)**

**2 tablespoons half-and-half or cream**

**1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**1 pound cooked skinless salmon fillet or hot-smoked salmon, flaked (see the sidebar at left)**

**3 tablespoons snipped fresh chives or thinly sliced scallion tops**

**1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill or**

**1½ teaspoons dried dill**

FOR THE GARNISH:

**4 fried or poached eggs (optional; see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 71, for cooking tips)**

**Drained capers**

**Fresh dill sprigs**

**Prepared horseradish (optional)**

**Make the dilled crème fraîche:** In a small bowl, stir together the crème fraîche, dill, salt, and lemon juice, if using. Taste and adjust the seasonings; set aside.

**Make the hash:** In a 10-inch cast-iron or other large heavy skillet, heat the butter and oil over medium-low heat. Add the potatoes, stirring to coat them with the fat. Cover and cook until the potatoes begin to turn golden and a bit tender with browned edges here and there, about 15 minutes (you should hear only a faint sizzling). Uncover the potatoes and turn them with a spatula. Raise the heat to medium and cook until uniformly soft with some crisp brown spots, about 5 minutes. Stir in the onion and pat the mixture down with the spatula. Cook until the onion is soft and the mixture begins to stick in a few spots and browns on the bottom, about 5 minutes. In a small bowl, whisk together the half-and-half, mustard, salt, and a generous grinding of pepper. Scrape up the hash and stir in the mustard mixture. Raise the heat to medium high. Continue cooking the hash, scraping it up and patting it back down another time or two until browned, another 5 to 8 minutes. Mix in the salmon, chives, and dill and cook until heated through, another 2 minutes. Serve hot, topping each portion with a fried or poached egg (if using) and a sprinkling of capers. Garnish with dill sprigs or a bit of horseradish on the side, if you like. Top each portion with a dollop of the dilled crème fraîche, passing the rest at the table.

## Browning is the key to a savory hash



*Cover and cook the potatoes until crisp and golden, with browned edges here and there.*



*Add the onion mixture and pat down with a spatula.*

*When the hash is nicely browned, mix in the salmon, chives, and dill; cook until just heated through.*







### Herbed Buttermilk Biscuits

*Yields about eight 3-inch or twelve 2-inch biscuits.*

Other delicate fresh herbs (tarragon, chives, chervil) will work in this recipe in place of the dill. For a browner crust, brush the tops of the biscuits with melted butter before baking.

**9 ounces (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour**  
**2 teaspoons baking powder**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon table salt**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon baking soda**  
**2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill or 2 teaspoons dried dill**  
**2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**3 tablespoons vegetable shortening or lard, well chilled and cut into small chunks**  
**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, well chilled and cut into small chunks**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup plus 2 tablespoons buttermilk**

Position an oven rack on the center rung and heat the oven to 450°F. Lightly flour a small cutting board and set aside (this

portable surface is easy to transfer to the refrigerator). Sift the flour, baking powder, salt, baking soda, and dried dill (if using) into a large, preferably shallow bowl. Mix in the fresh dill (if using) and the parsley. Add the shortening and butter to the dry ingredients. Combine with a pastry blender or two table knives just until a coarse meal forms. Make a well in the center and pour in the buttermilk. With your fingers (or a wooden spoon) and using just a few swift strokes, blend the dough just until combined (it will be a sticky mess; this is fine). Turn it out onto the floured cutting board. Wash, dry, and flour your hands. Gently pat out the dough and fold it back over itself about half a dozen times, just until smooth. Pat it out again, this time into a round or oval that's an even  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick. Cover the dough lightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for about 20 minutes.

Remove the cutting board with the dough from the refrigerator. Cut the dough with a sharp biscuit cutter—avoid twisting the cutter—trying to get as many rounds as possible (the dough will toughen a bit each time you work it). Lightly pat the remaining dough scraps together, pat down evenly, and cut again. Position the biscuits at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake, rotating the pan halfway through to ensure even cooking, until raised and golden brown (10 to 12 minutes total for 3-inch biscuits; 9 to 11 minutes for 2-inch biscuits).



### Broiled Grapefruit

*Serves four.*

Feel free to vary the spices you use here: try replacing the cinnamon with cardamom, allspice, or nutmeg.

**2 large pink or red grapefruit, halved, at room temperature**  
**3 tablespoons light or dark brown sugar**  
 **$1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons all-purpose flour**  
**1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger (or  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground ginger)**  
 **$\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon**  
**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened at room temperature**

Position a broiler pan several inches away from the heating element and heat the broiler. Section each grapefruit half by cutting between the rind and the pulp and between each membrane. In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar, flour, ginger, cinnamon, and softened butter until well blended. Distribute the mixture among the four grapefruit halves, smearing it on the cut side of each one. Broil until the topping is bubbly and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Serve immediately.

## A shaggy dough makes a tender biscuit



*Scrape the sticky dough out of the bowl and onto a small, floured cutting board.*



*After gently kneading the dough, patting it out, and chilling it briefly, use a sharp cutter to punch out the biscuits. Try to avoid twisting the cutter so the biscuits rise as much as possible.*

*Cheryl Alters Jamison and Bill Jamison are the authors of A Real American Breakfast. They live in Santa Fe, New Mexico. ♦*



# Baking Chocolate-Chip Cookies Two Ways

Make them crisp or  
chewy by changing  
the proportion of  
sugars and chilling or  
warming the dough

BY BONNIE GORDER-HINCHEY





Since the first Toll House cookie slid off a baking sheet about 70 years ago, America has been in love with the chocolate-chip cookie. Yet when you ask people to describe the ultimate cookie, you'll find a great rift in our nation—some like them crisp, some like them chewy.

Funny thing is, the ingredient list for a chocolate-chip cookie always looks more or less the same: butter, sugar (white and brown), eggs, vanilla, flour, baking soda, salt, and chocolate chips (OK, and maybe nuts, but that's the subject of another debate). How can these same ingredients produce both chewy cookies and crisp ones?

Just how you achieve the state of crunch you like is the subject of many theories, from refrigerating the dough, to underbaking the cookies, to consulting the Weather Channel for a change in the barometric pressure. After baking, and eating, many batches of cookies, I think I've broken the cookie code. It's a question of knowing how key factors in the dough affect the cookie's texture.

## To get the cookie you like, control the amount and temperature of key ingredients



**Sugar.** The moisture in sugar affects chewiness: The relative amount of white vs. brown sugar you use has a great effect on texture because each type has a different moisture content (brown sugar is much wetter than white). Using more brown sugar will produce a softer, chewier cookie, while using more white sugar will turn out cookies that are sandier in texture and crisper overall.



**Flour.** Keep in mind that the way you measure flour makes a big difference. Too much flour will make the cookie firm, dry, and tough, while too little flour will cause the cookie to spread too much and lose structure. I always use a scale to measure my flour so my results are as consistent as possible. If I do use a measuring cup, here's how I do it: First, I always use a true dry measure—not a Pyrex cup. I fluff the flour with a fork to avoid densely packed flour. Then I spoon the flour from the bag into the measuring cup and level it with a knife—never scoop right from the bag, which would compact too much flour into the cup. And I'm careful not to shake or tap the cup as I add the flour, as this would pack down the flour as well.

**Butter & Eggs.** Baking recipes usually specify the temperature for butter and eggs, but does it really matter? Absolutely. The temperature of these ingredients helps control how much the dough spreads. Cool ingredients will keep your dough cooler, which means it will spread more slowly in the oven, letting the oven's heat "set" the



cookie while it's still thick and producing a denser, chewier cookie. Warm dough spreads more quickly



in the oven, which makes the cookies thinner and crisper. The photo above shows how cold and warm doughs react after 3 minutes in the oven. The dough on the bottom left went into the oven cold; the dough for the cookies top and right was at room temperature. A

high proportion of butter to flour in the dough will also allow it to spread quickly.

Warming eggs quickly is as easy as dunking them in warm water for a minute or two. Butter presents a bigger problem. Some people warm butter in the microwave, but just a few seconds too long and it's melted. It's best just to plan ahead.

Your kitchen's temperature will affect the temperature of the dough, as will dropping cookies onto still-hot cookie sheets: For chewy cookies, be sure to have enough cool sheets handy. And humid weather will soften even the crispest cookies in as little as a day, so store them well wrapped.



## Thin & Crisp

### Crisp Chocolate-Chip Cookies

*Yields about 6 dozen 3-inch cookies.*

Adding more white sugar than brown sugar increases the crispness. Be sure the butter and eggs are at room temperature before mixing to help the cookies spread thinner as they bake. Greased baking sheets encourage the cookies to spread even more.

**12 ounces (1½ cups) unsalted butter, at room temperature**  
**1 cup granulated sugar**  
**¾ cup packed light brown sugar**  
**2 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract**  
**13½ ounces (3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour**  
**1 teaspoon table salt**  
**1 teaspoon baking soda**  
**12 ounces semisweet chocolate chips**

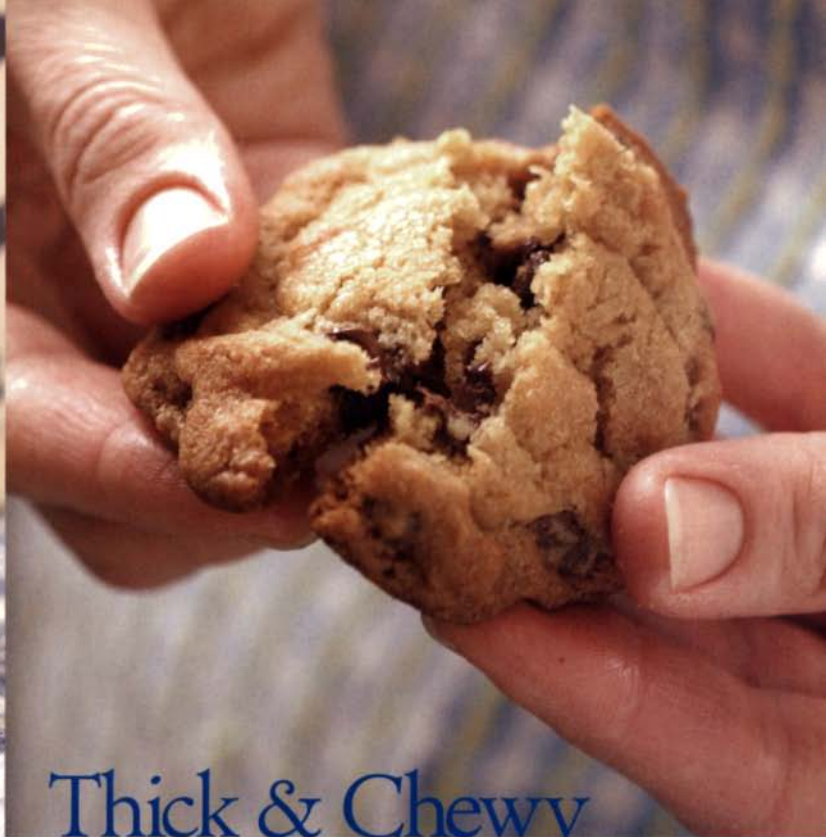
Arrange oven racks in the upper and middle positions of the oven. Heat the oven to 375°F and grease two baking sheets.

Using a mixer fitted with a paddle, beat together the butter, granulated sugar, and

brown sugar on high until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Scrape the bowl and beater. Add the eggs and vanilla and beat on low until blended. Beat on high until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Scrape the bowl and beater.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and baking soda. Add this to the butter mixture and beat on medium low until just blended. Stir in the chocolate chips with a wooden spoon.

Drop rounded measuring teaspoons of dough 2 inches apart onto the greased baking sheets. Bake until deep golden brown around the edges and golden in the center, 8 to 10 minutes, rotating the baking sheets halfway through for even results. Remove the sheets from the oven, let sit for 3 to 5 minutes, and then transfer the cookies with a spatula to a wire rack to cool completely. Repeat until all the dough is baked.



## Thick & Chewy

### Chewy Chocolate-Chip Cookies

*Yields about 9 dozen 2½-inch cookies.*

I use butter and eggs right out of the refrigerator so the dough stays cool and the cookies maintain their thickness during baking; I also use ungreased cookie sheets. To keep the cookies soft and chewy, store them in an airtight container along with a slice of bread.

**10¾ ounces (1½ cups) unsalted butter, cold**  
**1½ cups packed light brown sugar**  
**1 cup granulated sugar**  
**2 large eggs, cold**  
**1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract**  
**17 ounces (3¾ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour**  
**1¼ teaspoons table salt**  
**1 teaspoon baking soda**  
**12 ounces semisweet chocolate chips**

Arrange oven racks in the upper and middle positions of the oven. Heat the oven to 375°F.

Using a mixer fitted with a paddle, beat together the butter, brown sugar, and granulated sugar, starting on low speed and gradually working

your way up to high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy, about 3 minutes once you reach high speed. Scrape the bowl and beater. Add the eggs and vanilla and beat on low until blended. Beat on high until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Scrape the bowl and beater.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and baking soda. Add this to the butter mixture and stir with a wooden spoon until just blended; the dough will be stiff. Stir in the chocolate chips.

Drop rounded measuring teaspoons of dough about 2 inches apart onto two ungreased baking sheets. Refrigerate any unused dough. Bake until the bottoms are golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes, rotating the sheets halfway through for even results. Remove the sheets from the oven, let sit for 3 to 5 minutes, and then transfer the cookies with a spatula to a wire rack to cool completely. Let the baking sheets cool completely before baking the remaining dough.



# Oven-Roasted Ribs

BY STEVE JOHNSON



*Slow-Cooked Memphis Ribs  
with Barbecue Sauce*

Slow cooking makes these spareribs extra tender;  
bold rubs and intense sauces give them a spicy kick





## How to cook and carve oven-roasted ribs

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Sprinkle and press  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the rub on both sides of each rib rack. Put the racks, meaty side up, on a broiling pan or a wire roasting rack set over a baking sheet. Lightly season the ribs with salt and put them in the oven. After the first hour, rotate the pan every 30 minutes (Note: If you use two baking sheets, switch their position in the oven, too). The ribs will sizzle gently as they cook, and they'll become tender after about 2 hours in the oven.

2. To test for doneness, pick up the center of the ribs with tongs; the ends of the ribs should flop downward (this means the fat and cartilage have broken down), and a skewer inserted between the ribs should meet little resistance. If the meat between the ribs is still tough, keep cooking, checking every 15 minutes and rotating the pan.



3. Remove the rib racks from the oven, put them on a cutting board meaty side down (so they're easier to slice), and slice them into individual ribs. Arrange the ribs on a platter and serve with the sauce on the side.

About this time every year, I really start to miss the flavors of grilled food. The sky goes gray, the air turns cool, and I stare at my oven wondering how I can replicate my favorite grilled dishes. This is why I came up with these delicious slow-roasted ribs. While they don't make me forget everything I'm missing about outdoor cooking, I think you'll agree that these spice-rubbed ribs are an excellent substitute. Your friends and family will love them as a party appetizer or as a substantial meal, and you'll be

happy to know they're terribly easy to make—just pop them in the oven and cook until tender.

### Ask your butcher for St. Louis-cut spareribs

Pork spareribs are my ribs of choice. Less expensive than baby back ribs, they're also easier to cook and much more flavorful. There's just one thing I do to make them even easier to eat. I use a trimmed rack of ribs called the St. Louis cut, which is simply a rack of spareribs from which the butcher has removed the long strip of fatty, carti-

### MAKE THE RIBS AHEAD

The tender, fatty meat of the ribs makes them hold up well to reheating. You can cook the ribs a day ahead and reheat them uncut, loosely covered with foil, in a 250°F oven until warmed through, 20 to 30 minutes.



## drink choices

Ribs need a pretty substantial ale—Anchor Steam's Liberty Ale or Red Hook would both be good. If you're wine-inclined, try a full-bodied Zinfandel, such as the 2000 Chateau Souverain (\$15) or Rosenblum's Vintners Cuvee XXIV (\$10).

luginous joints that attach the ribs to the sternum. Cutting off this strip of gnarled meat makes the ribs a more uniform shape so they cook more evenly. They're also easier to cut into individual ribs after cooking. If you can't get a butcher to remove this section for you, you can do it yourself following the directions on p. 69.

### **Rubs pack a lot of flavor; serve the sauce on the side**

Whenever you order pork ribs in a barbecue restaurant in Memphis, the counter person asks, "Wet or dry?"—meaning glazed with barbecue sauce dur-

ing cooking or dry-rubbed and served with the sauce on the side. Years of tasting ribs has brought me to the conclusion that dry-rubbed ribs let you taste the true talents of the pitmaster's technique and then apply his "finishing sauce" to your tastes.

I prefer to cook ribs at home this way: dry-rubbed but not basted. I serve these two rib recipes—down-home Southern-style ribs and a take on Asian spareribs—with a dipping sauce on the side so everyone can have as much or as little sauce as he or she likes. The rubbed ribs are tasty enough to eat on their own, and the sauces only add to the fun.



**Chinese-Style Spareribs  
& Dipping Sauce**

## Slow-Cooked Memphis Ribs



*Taste the Memphis ribs first and then spoon on the sauce. Pair the ribs with traditional accompaniments like cornbread and coleslaw.*

*Serves four to six as a main course or six to twelve as an appetizer.*

**2 full (13-rib) racks of St. Louis-cut pork spareribs (about 3 pounds each)**  
**Kosher salt for sprinkling**

Follow the directions on p. 57 to roast the ribs, using the rub recipe below. Serve with the barbecue sauce (recipe below).

### Memphis Spice Rub

*Yields ½ cup.*

**2½ tablespoons hot chili powder**  
**2 tablespoons ground cumin**  
**1 tablespoon ground coriander**  
**1 tablespoon kosher salt**  
**½ tablespoon paprika**  
**½ tablespoon dark brown sugar**  
**½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**  
**¼ teaspoon cayenne**

In a small bowl, stir together all the ingredients.

### Barbecue Sauce

*Yields about 2 cups.*

**¼ cup vegetable oil**  
**1 medium onion, finely diced**  
**Kosher salt**  
**1 can (14 ounces) tomato purée**  
**2 tablespoons dark brown sugar**  
**2 tablespoons tomato paste**  
**2 tablespoons cider vinegar**  
**1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce**  
**1 tablespoon Tabasco sauce**  
**1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**  
**1 teaspoon hot chili powder**  
**1 teaspoon paprika**  
**¼ teaspoon cayenne**

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat the oil and add the onion. Season lightly with salt and sauté until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the tomato purée, brown sugar, tomato paste, cider vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, Tabasco, mustard, chili powder, paprika, and cayenne and stir well. Turn down the heat to low and let the sauce simmer until it thickens slightly, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat, season to taste with salt, and let cool to room temperature. The sauce will keep for about a week in the refrigerator.

## Chinese-Style Spareribs



*Serves four to six as a main course or six to twelve as an appetizer.*

**2 full (13-rib) racks of St. Louis-cut pork spareribs (about 3 pounds each)**  
**Kosher salt for sprinkling**

Follow the directions on p. 57 to roast the ribs, using the rub recipe below. Serve with the dipping sauce (recipe below).

### Chinese Spice Rub

*Yields ½ cup.*

**2 tablespoons ground coriander**  
**2 tablespoons hot chili powder**  
**2 tablespoons dark brown sugar**  
**1 tablespoon five-spice powder**  
**1 tablespoon ground fennel seeds**  
**1 tablespoon kosher salt**  
**1 teaspoon dried red chile flakes**

In a small bowl, stir together all the ingredients.

*Stack the ribs for a festive presentation. For serving large groups, the author likes to stack the ribs, drizzle them with the Asian dipping sauce, and garnish with sliced scallions.*

### Asian Dipping Sauce

*Yields about ⅔ cup.*

**¼ cup soy sauce**  
**2 tablespoons granulated sugar**  
**2 tablespoons rice vinegar**  
**1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger**  
**1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil**

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, bring the soy sauce, sugar, rice vinegar, ginger, and sesame oil to a simmer, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. The sauce will keep for about a week in the refrigerator.

*The spice rubs can be made ahead and will keep well for a few weeks, but fresher is better.*

*Steve Johnson is the chef-owner of The Blue Room in Cambridge, Massachusetts. ♦*



# Asian Noodle Soups

Break away from the everyday without losing the comfort factor of noodle soups

BY EVA KATZ

**N**othing conquers winter chills quite like a steaming bowl of soup. While old standards like chicken noodle are always reliable, I'm often in the mood to make something different but still comforting. That's when I make these Asian noodle soups. They're incredibly tasty—bright, zippy, big on flavor—and yet require no more ingredients than what you can find in a well-stocked supermarket. And unlike a traditional stock-based soup, they come together relatively quickly.

## Create a flavorful broth in layers

These soups get their complexity from a combination of both bold and subtle flavors. Layers of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy make a full-flavored broth that defines the character of each soup.

I start by simmering beef, chicken, or shrimp in a combination of water and canned chicken broth. (For the

shrimp version, the flavorful shells are used and then strained out.) The canned broth provides a savory shortcut that doesn't intrude on the natural flavor infused into the broth by the meat as it cooks. What you get is a rich, deep, flavorful broth without having to use whole chickens or large pieces of fatty beef that require long simmering times, straining, chilling, and defatting. The soup is almost ready to serve once the broth is completed.

I introduce classic Asian flavors to the broth in two layers. First, I sauté the aromatic ingredients, which might include chiles, ginger, garlic, onions, lemongrass, and spices. These are highly fragrant ingredients, and cooking them in hot oil before the broth is added lets their flavors open up. Next, I enhance the broth with ingredients like soy sauce, fish sauce, chile paste, coconut milk, rice vinegar or rice wine.

## Starchy Asian noodles are best cooked separately

There's an astonishing variety of Asian noodles made from everything from buckwheat to rice. Most are fairly neutral in flavor and mainly characterized by their appearance and texture, ranging in degree of chewiness and slipperiness. They're ideal for soups.

In the recipes on the following pages, I've recommended the specific type of Asian noodle I prefer. A bit of swapping and experimenting, however, is a worthy pursuit (for suggestions, see the sidebar opposite). But whichever noodles you choose, don't cook them directly in the soup or the broth will become cloudy and starchy. It's also important to note that once the noodles are added to the soup, they absorb liquid, expand, and become quite soft. For this reason, it's best to keep the cooked noodles aside until just before serving.



## Cinnamon Beef Noodle Soup

*Serves six to eight.*

Packaged stewing beef is often made up of irregularly shaped pieces from different cuts, so I cut my own stew meat using a boneless chuck roast or two ¾-inch-thick chuck steaks.

- 1 teaspoon peanut or vegetable oil**
- 3 cinnamon sticks (about 3 inches each)**
- 6 scallions, cut into 1½-inch pieces**
- 6 cloves garlic, smashed**
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger**
- 1½ teaspoons anise seeds**
- 1½ teaspoons Asian chile paste (see p. 72)**
- 7 cups water**
- 4 cups homemade or canned low-salt chicken broth**
- ½ cup soy sauce**
- ¼ cup rice vinegar**
- 2½ pounds boneless beef chuck, trimmed and cut into ¾-inch cubes**
- 9 ounces fresh udon noodles (or 6 ounces dried)**
- 1- to 1½-pound bunch bok choy, bottom trimmed, stalks washed and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves**

Heat the oil in a heavy soup pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. When very hot, add the cinnamon, scallions, garlic, ginger, anise seeds, and chile paste; cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the water, broth, soy sauce, and vinegar; bring to a boil over high heat. Add the meat and bring to a vigorous simmer. Lower the heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook, partially covered, until the meat is very tender, about 1½ hours, checking to be sure that the soup doesn't boil or stop simmering.

Shortly before the soup is done, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Cook the noodles according to the package directions until just tender. Drain and rinse under cold water.

When the meat is tender, remove the cinnamon sticks. Add the bok choy to the soup and simmer until the stalks are crisp-tender and the greens are very tender, 5 to 10 minutes. Stir in the noodles and let them warm through. Serve immediately, garnished with the cilantro leaves.

## Three versatile Asian noodles



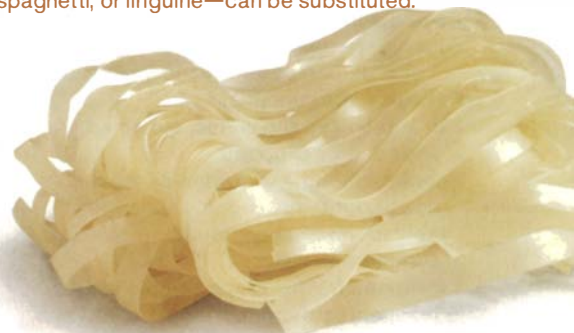
### UDON NOODLES

are a Japanese noodle made with wheat flour and water. Plump, white, and slippery, they're most commonly used in soups and stews. They may be round, square, or flat and are sold both fresh and dried in the Asian or natural-foods section of the supermarket. You can substitute Chinese wheat-flour noodles.



### CHINESE EGG NOODLES

are classic Asian noodles made from wheat flour, water, and egg. Springy with a slight chew, these noodles are made in thin or thick strands. Look for fresh ones in the supermarket's produce department; be sure they contain egg and aren't tinted with food coloring instead. Fresh or dried pasta—angel hair, spaghetti, or linguine—can be substituted.



### RICE NOODLES,

made from rice flour and water, have a subtle flavor and an appealing chewy texture. They can be very thin, sometimes called "vermicelli," or flat and narrow to wide. The recipe on p. 62 calls for the latter, but another size would work just as well. Look for them in the Asian section of your grocery store.





## Spicy Noodle Soup with Shrimp & Coconut Milk

*Serves four.*

Don't be intimidated by the long list of ingredients here—this soup comes together in under an hour. The end result is otherworldly: a bowl of rice noodles bathed in a silky, spicy coconut broth and capped with a crunchy, cooling garnish.

### FOR THE SOUP BASE:

- 1 small onion, roughly chopped**
- 2-inch piece fresh ginger (about 1 ounce), peeled and sliced into disks**
- 5 cloves garlic, crushed**
- 2 to 3 fresh serrano chiles, stemmed and roughly chopped**
- 2 stalks lemongrass, trimmed (see the box at right) and roughly sliced**
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground coriander seeds**
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground cumin seeds**
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric**
- ¼ cup fish sauce**
- 2 teaspoons light brown sugar**
- 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil**
- Shells from the shrimp for the soup**
- 2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- 3 cups water**
- 1 can (14 ounces) coconut milk**
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt**

### FOR THE SOUP:

- 6 to 7 ounces wide rice noodles**
- ¼ English (seedless) cucumber**
- 1 cup mung bean sprouts, rinsed and dried**
- 1 fresh chile (serrano, jalapeño, or Thai), stemmed and sliced into thin rounds (optional)**
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves, roughly chopped or torn**
- ½ cup fresh mint leaves, roughly chopped or torn**
- 1 pound shrimp (31 to 40 per pound), shells removed and reserved; deveined**
- 4 lime wedges**

**Make the soup base:** Put the onion, ginger, garlic, chile, lemongrass, coriander, cumin, turmeric, fish sauce, and brown sugar in a food processor. Purée to make a paste, scraping down the sides as needed. Heat the oil in a heavy soup pot or Dutch oven over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Add the paste mixture and sauté, stirring often, until it softens, becomes very aromatic, and deepens in color, about 8 minutes. Stir in the shrimp shells and cook until they turn pink, about 2 minutes. Add the chicken broth, water, coconut milk,

lime juice, and salt and bring to a boil. Lower the heat so that the broth simmers gently for 30 minutes. Strain the broth through a fine sieve and discard the solids. Clean the pot; return the broth to the pot, season with salt to taste, and return to a simmer.

### While the soup base is simmering:

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and then remove from the heat. Put the rice noodles in the water and let sit until tender, 5 to 10 minutes. Drain, rinse, and distribute among four large, shallow soup bowls.

Slice the cucumber into ¼-inch rounds, stack the rounds, and slice into thin matchsticks. Put the cucumber sticks in a medium bowl and toss with the bean sprouts, sliced chiles (if using), and herbs.

Just before serving, add the shrimp to the broth and gently simmer until they're just cooked through, about 3 minutes. Ladle the hot soup over the noodles. Arrange a mound of the cucumber and bean sprout mixture in the center of the bowl, top with a lime wedge, and serve immediately.



## Chicken Noodle Soup with Ginger, Shiitakes & Leeks

*Serves four to six.*

**¾ ounce dried shiitake mushrooms (about 12)**  
**5 bone-in chicken thighs (1½ to 2 pounds), skinned, fat trimmed**  
**Kosher salt to taste**  
**2 teaspoons peanut or vegetable oil**  
**1 large or 2 small leeks (white and light green parts only), sliced into thin half moons and washed**  
**3 tablespoons minced fresh ginger**  
**4 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**  
**3 cups water**  
**¼ cup mirin or rice wine**  
**2 tablespoons soy sauce**  
**1 tablespoon rice vinegar**  
**1 teaspoon Asian chile paste (see p. 72)**  
**9 ounces fresh Chinese egg noodles**  
**1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil**  
**Freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**2 scallions, thinly sliced on the bias (about ⅓ cup)**

Put the shiitakes in a bowl and cover with about 1½ cups boiling water. Set a small plate or pot lid over the mushrooms to ensure they're submerged, and soak until softened, about 20 minutes. Discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps. Set a sieve lined with cheesecloth or a damp paper towel over a measuring cup and strain the soaking liquid through it. Reserve the liquid and shiitakes separately.

Rinse the chicken thighs and pat dry with paper towels; season with salt. Heat the oil in a heavy soup pot or Dutch oven over medium-low heat.

When the oil is hot, add the chicken, cover the pot, and cook for about 10 minutes, turning once or twice. The aim is to sweat (not brown) the chicken until it loses its raw pink color on the outside and begins to exude some of its juices. Stir in the leeks, ginger, and sliced shiitakes; cover and cook until the leeks begin to soften, about another 5 minutes.

Add the broth, water, reserved mushroom soaking liquid, mirin, soy sauce, vinegar, and chile paste, and bring to a vigorous simmer over high heat. Adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook uncovered until the chicken is very tender and falling off the bone, about 45 minutes. Remove the chicken and set it aside.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil. Cook the noodles until just tender, about 3 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water.

When the chicken is cool enough to handle, remove the meat from the bones and roughly chop or tear it into bite-size pieces. Return the meat to the soup. Add the sesame oil and season the soup to taste with salt and pepper.

Stir the noodles into the soup and let them heat through. Ladle the soup into bowls, top with the sliced scallions, and serve immediately.

*Eva Katz is a freelance writer and recipe developer who lives in Boston. ♦*

## A buyers' guide to Asian ingredients

**LEMONGRASS:** Fresh lemongrass should be firm and pale to medium green, with a pinkish-white bulb; avoid stalks that are dry and yellow. Trim lemongrass by cutting off the spiky green top and enough of the bottom to eliminate the woody core. Peel off a few of the outer layers until you get to the tender heart of the stalk.

**SOY SAUCE:** Look for naturally brewed soy sauce, which is mellow and well balanced. (Many brands are chemically fermented, and their flavors can be sharp, acidic, bitter, and overly salty.) Kikkoman is fine and widely available.

**SESAME OIL:** Asian sesame oil is made from toasted seeds. It ranges from golden to brown in color and has a pronounced nutty flavor. It's primarily used for seasoning, not cooking, and a little can go a long way. A lighter version, made with untoasted seeds and sold in health-food or Middle Eastern stores, can also be used as a flavoring but is more suitable for cooking.

**FISH SAUCE:** The pungent, salty flavor of fish sauce is made by packing fish (usually anchovies) in crocks or barrels, covering with a brine, and letting the fish ferment over periods of months. Fish sauce is often labeled *nuoc mam* (the Vietnamese name) or *nam pla* (Thai).

**MIRIN:** A Japanese rice wine with an 8% to 14% alcohol content and lots of sugar, mirin is used only in cooking. Look for *hon-mirin*, which is naturally brewed and sweetened. *Aji-mirin* may be easier to find but is made with additives, including salt and corn syrup.

**COCONUT MILK:** Wrung from grated and water-soaked coconut flesh, coconut milk shouldn't be confused with coconut cream, which is a heavy, sweetened product often used in Latin American cooking. (The clear, flavorful juice inside the coconut shell is called coconut water.)





# Pot de Crème, the Ultimate Pudding

BY MARTIN COURTMAN

One of my favorite ways to end a meal—whether it's a fancy dinner at Chateau Souverain, the winery where I'm executive chef, or a casual gathering of friends at home—is with the luscious French custard called pot de crème (pronounced *POH duh krem*). Pot de crème is all about creamy texture, intense flavor, and contented silence: I've found that a tableful of even the chattiest diners suddenly goes quiet when this heavenly dessert arrives.

Pot de crème is also about convenience—you can (and should) make it the day before you plan to serve it, so when it's time for dessert, all you have to do is pull the chilled custards out of the refrigerator and decorate them.

When I began making this years ago I focused on classic vanilla, but over time I began to develop my own favorite flavors. Here you'll find recipes for three of the best: chocolate, coffee-caramel, and lemon. Although the flavors differ, the method is the same, and the tips at right will help you with all of them.

## **For the creamiest texture, use a double doneness test**

Making pot de crème isn't hard, but it does call for good technique and sure-fire doneness testing; see photo #4 on the opposite page. Again, this dessert is all about luscious texture. If the pot de crème is undercooked, it will be tasty but runny, but overcooking can make it grainy.

Lemon Pots de Crème



# 4 key tips for a creamy texture



**1 Whisk thoroughly but gently.** Although you're using a whisk here, it's for thorough mixing, rather than for aerating the custard, so go easy. Vigorous whisking can result in a foamy, perforated-looking surface instead of a smooth one.



**2 Cook the custard slowly to 170°F on the stovetop.** You may have seen recipes where the custard isn't cooked at all on the stovetop and thus for a long time in the oven, but my method calls for a few minutes' gentle cooking on the stove, which then reduces the oven time. The temperature rises quickly, so as the thermometer approaches 170°F, pull the pot off the heat.

**3 Be sure the water for the water bath is very hot when you add it.** This keeps the custard at a consistent but gentle heat as it goes from the stove to the oven.



**4 To test for doneness, jiggle—and use a thermometer as a backup.** When set, pot de crème does a "firm jiggle": If you nudge the ramekin, the custard will be firm about ¼ inch of the way in from the sides but the center will respond with a jiggle, rather than a wavelike motion (which would mean it's still too liquid). Another reliable test is to use an instant-read thermometer, which should register 150° to 155°F (the hole left by the thermometer will close as the custard firms). If in doubt, take the custards out of the oven on the early side, since they firm as they chill.

## The right vessel for your pot de crème



There's room for improvisation when choosing a cup for the custards. The recipes here call for 6-ounce ramekins and yield eight servings, but lots of different vessels work: Those neat-looking custard cups you found at a tag sale, ramekins that

are slightly smaller, even coffee cups or teacups will all work, provided they're oven- or microwave safe.

If you end up using cups that are smaller than the 6-ounce ramekins we used in our test kitchen, you will, of course, end up with more than eight

servings (not a bad thing at all). More important, the custards may not take as long to cook, so start checking early for doneness. Also, the thinner the walls of the cup, the shorter the cooking time.

There are sets of small covered pots used ex-

pressly for pots de crème. You'll often find them in antique stores and from specialty china purveyors (check the Web). These traditional pots de crème have a smaller capacity, and new ones can be pricey, but they make a fun presentation. —the editors



## How to bake the custards

Use this method for all the recipes here. Divide the mixture among the ramekins in the roasting pan. Pull out the oven shelf, put the roasting pan on it (be sure it's stable), and pour enough boiling water into the pan so that it comes halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Cover the ramekins with a sheet of foil (simply lay the sheet on top, don't crimp the edges) and bake for 25 to 45 minutes—start checking early—until the custards are set about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in from the sides, the centers respond with a firm jiggle (not a wavelike motion) when you nudge the ramekins, and the centers of the custards register  $150^{\circ}$  to  $155^{\circ}\text{F}$  on an instant-read thermometer (the hole left by the thermometer will close up as the custards firm). Let the custards cool to room temperature in their water bath. Remove the custards from the bath, cover them with plastic, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours and up to two days before serving. Garnish as you like; see the ideas below.

## Garnishes

I like to garnish pot de crème with a dollop of whipped cream (or a rosette from a pastry bag). But you needn't stop there. For the chocolate pot de crème, try a sprig of mint or chocolate shavings. For the lemon and coffee-caramel versions, a sliver of candied citrus peel is lovely, as is a sprig of another delicate herb, or a candied flower, as shown on p. 64. (For candied flower sources, see p. 76.)



## Chocolate Pots de Crème

*Serves eight.*

- 1 quart heavy cream**
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup granulated sugar**
- $\frac{1}{2}$  vanilla bean, seeds scraped and pod reserved (or 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract)**
- 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped (to yield a generous  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup)**
- 1 ounce ( $\frac{1}{4}$  cup) unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted**
- 10 large egg yolks**



Put a large pot of water on to boil for the water bath. Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to  $325^{\circ}\text{F}$ . Put eight 6-ounce ramekins in a large roasting pan or baking dish with high sides.

**Make the chocolate cream:** In a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, heat the cream,  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of the sugar, and the vanilla seeds and pod (if you're using vanilla extract,

don't add it yet) until just below boiling. In a bowl, mix the chocolate and cocoa together. Slowly add the hot cream, stirring constantly, until the chocolate is melted and the mixture is smooth. Return the mixture to the saucepan. In a clean bowl, combine the egg yolks

with the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup sugar; beat until smooth. Gently whisk a ladleful of the hot chocolate cream into the yolks and then whisk the yolk mixture into the saucepan with the rest of the chocolate cream. Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until the mixture reaches  $170^{\circ}\text{F}$  on an instant-read thermometer, 3 to 4 minutes. Strain immediately through cheesecloth or a fine sieve. If you're using vanilla extract, stir it in now.

**Bake the custards:** See the baking directions at left.

## Lemon Pots de Crème

*Serves eight.*

**Finely grated zest of 4 lemons, plus**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup fresh lemon juice**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup granulated sugar**  
 **$3\frac{1}{2}$  cups heavy cream**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  vanilla bean, seeds scraped and pod reserved (or 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract)**  
**10 large egg yolks**



Put a large pot of water on to boil for the water bath. Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Put eight 6-ounce ramekins in a large roasting pan or baking dish with high sides.

**Make the lemon syrup and heat the cream:** In a small saucepan, combine the lemon zest, juice, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the sugar. Simmer until reduced to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup, about 15 minutes; set aside. In a medium saucepan, combine the cream,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the sugar, and the vanilla seeds and pod (if you're using vanilla extract, don't add it yet) and bring to just below boiling. Remove from the heat.

**Make the lemon cream:** In a medium bowl, beat the egg yolks with the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup sugar until smooth. Gently whisk a ladleful of the hot cream into the yolks and then whisk the yolk mixture into the saucepan with the rest of the cream. Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until the mixture reaches 170°F on an instant-read thermometer, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the reserved syrup and strain immediately through cheesecloth or a fine sieve. If you're using vanilla extract, stir it in now.

**Bake the custards:** See the baking directions at left.



## Coffee-Caramel Pots de Crème

*Serves eight.*

**$\frac{2}{3}$  cup granulated sugar**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup water**  
 **$3\frac{1}{2}$  cups heavy cream**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  vanilla bean, seeds scraped and pod reserved (or 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract)**  
**1 tablespoon ground espresso (or 2 teaspoons instant coffee or instant espresso granules)**  
**10 large egg yolks**



Put a large pot of water on to boil for the water bath. Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Put eight 6-ounce ramekins in a large roasting pan or baking dish with high sides.

**Make the caramel cream:** In a medium saucepan, combine the sugar and water and cook over medium heat until the sugar dissolves. Raise the heat to high and cook, swirling the pan occasionally, until the mixture is deep amber. Remove the pan from the heat and add a few tablespoons of the cream. Be

careful—the hot caramel will spatter. Add a bit more cream and then the rest.

The caramel will seize and harden, but it will melt in the cream as you simmer it. Set the pan over medium-low heat. Add the vanilla seeds and pod (if you're using vanilla extract, don't add it yet) and the espresso or coffee to

the caramel cream. While stirring constantly, slowly bring the cream to just below a boil; remove from the heat. In a medium bowl, beat the egg yolks until smooth. Whisk a ladleful of the caramel cream into the yolks and then whisk the yolk mixture into the saucepan with the rest of the caramel cream. Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until the mixture reaches 170°F on an instant-read thermometer, 3 to 4 minutes. Strain immediately through cheesecloth or a fine sieve. If you're using vanilla extract, stir it in now.

**Bake the custards:** See the baking directions at left.

*Martin Courtman is the executive chef at Chateau Souverain in Geyserville, California. ♦*



It's 11 a.m. and eight *Fine Cooking* staff members are gathered in the test kitchen, spoons poised, ready to dig into the bowls of glistening canned tomatoes arranged on the counter before us. For the

make educated decisions at the market, it's tough tasting seven kinds of vinegar or mustard in a row, as we've done in previous tastings. In this edition of *From Our Test Kitchen*, you'll find the results of our tomato

**“Blind tastings are something that we both enjoy and dread.”**

next 30 minutes, there's silence, punctuated only by the scratching of pencils on test report sheets and an occasional exclamation of “What in the...?” Blind tastings are something that we both enjoy and dread, because, although we want to

tasting. Tasting panels we're planning for the future include Cheddar and bacon—something I know veterans of the vinegar and mustard tastings will be happy about.

—Jennifer Armentrout,  
test kitchen manager

## knife skills

# Trimming & Coring

Bulbs of fennel and heads of cabbage don't look or taste anything alike, but they do have something in common: The techniques for trimming, coring, and slicing them are remarkably similar.

—J. A.

## cabbage



## fennel



Peel away and discard any tough outer layers or leaves.

Cut the vegetable into quarters through the base.

Cut the core out of each quarter. You're now ready to slice and dice.

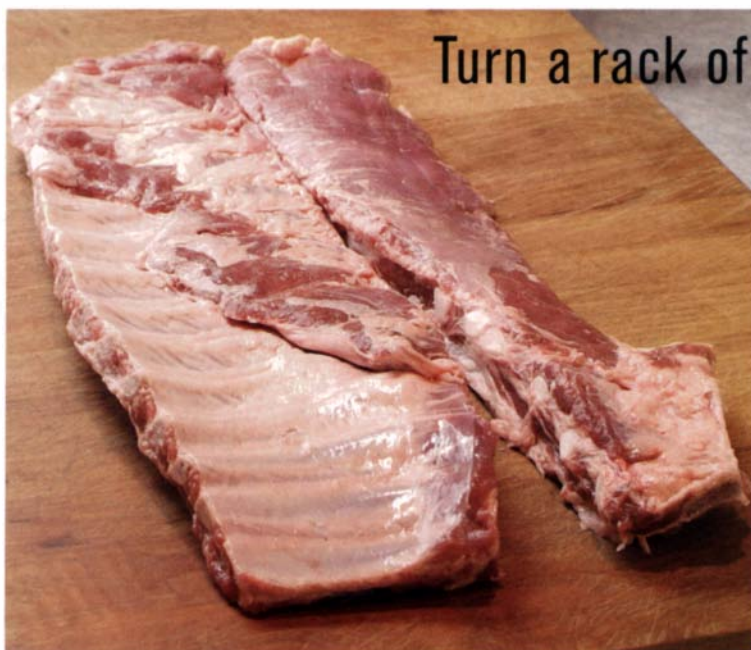
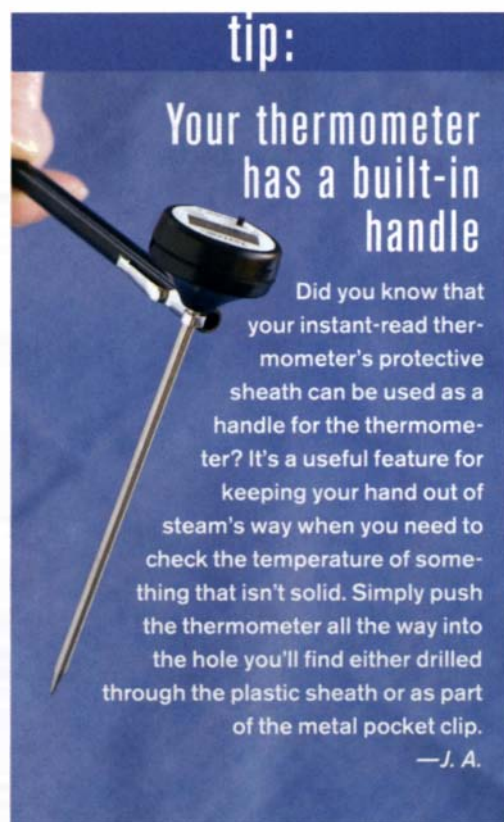
## What size *is* that ramekin?

The recipes for pot de crème on pp. 66-67 call for the custards to be baked in 6-ounce ramekins, but if your ramekins are like any of the dozens we have in the test kitchen, none of them are permanently imprinted with their capacities. When we started measuring our ramekins (by filling them with water and then pouring the water into a measuring cup), we discovered that none were exactly 6 ounces. So to choose a ramekin for the pots de crème, we decided that any ramekin that held 6 ounces of water with about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of space left over qualified as a 6-ounce ramekin. We used china markers to note the capacities on the bottoms of the ramekins so we wouldn't



have to measure them next time. If you don't have any ramekins that are close enough to 6 ounces, you can still bake the custards in vessels of other sizes; see p. 65 for more information.

—J. A.



## Turn a rack of spareribs into the St. Louis cut

For his oven-roasted ribs on p. 56, Steve Johnson likes to use St. Louis-cut ribs, which is really just a regular rack of spareribs with the breastbone and the adjacent strip of gnarled meat removed. A butcher can do this for you, or you can do it yourself. Here's how: Put the ribs, meat side down, on a cutting board. Use your fingers to identify the rib bones, the breastbone (the wide, flat piece of bone perpendicular to the rib bones), and the thin strips of cartilage between them (they'll feel like bony spurs attached to the breastbone). Using a chef's knife, cut between the ribs and breastbone, through the cartilage—the knife should meet little resistance. Continue cutting straight down the rack along the ends of the rib bones until you've removed the breastbone and the strip of gristly meat behind it, which you can save and freeze to braise or stew later.

—Tony Rosenfeld, associate editor



## Pot roast from your slow cooker

While testing slow cookers for her report on p. 20, editor-at-large Maryellen Driscoll developed this recipe for an amazingly tender pot roast with a robust gravy. It's a great treat to come home to a kitchen filled with the aroma of this pot roast.



### Slow-Cooked Pot Roast with Mustard & Horseradish Gravy

*Serves four.*

Serve over egg noodles or mashed potatoes along with roasted root vegetables or sautéed greens, such as spinach or chard.

- 2 carrots, peeled and cut in half widthwise**
- 1 medium yellow onion, peeled, root trimmed but left intact, and sliced into 4 wedges**
- 3 cloves garlic, smashed**
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme**
- 1 large bay leaf**
- 3 whole cloves or allspice berries**
- 1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- 1 cup dry white wine (such as Sauvignon Blanc)**
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste**
- 1 boneless beef chuck roast (2½ to 3 pounds)**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 tablespoons brandy**
- ½ teaspoon prepared horseradish**
- ½ teaspoon grainy prepared mustard**
- 2 tablespoons sour cream**
- 1 teaspoon all-purpose flour**
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Put the carrots, onion, garlic, thyme, bay leaf, and cloves or allspice in the bottom of a slow cooker crock. In a measuring cup or bowl, whisk together the broth, wine, and tomato paste to blend.

Set a large heavy-based skillet over medium-high heat. Pat the roast dry with paper towels, rub both sides

with the olive oil, and sprinkle generously with salt and pepper. Sear the roast in the skillet until a dark crust forms on one side, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn and sear the other side, 3 to 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium and put the roast on top of the vegetables in the crock. Add the broth mixture to the skillet, bring to a simmer, and scrape the pan bottom to loosen any browned bits. Pour the liquid over the roast and cover the crock; don't stir. Turn the slow cooker to low heat; cook gently without lifting the lid until the roast is fall-apart tender, 8 to 10 hours.

Transfer the roast to a cutting board and tent with foil to keep warm. Strain the contents of the crock through a sieve set over a medium saucepan. Discard the solids. Skim the fat from the top of the strained liquid (or use a fat separator). Bring to a boil and then simmer rapidly until reduced by half, about 10 minutes. Whisk in the brandy, horseradish, and mustard. In a small bowl, mix the flour into the sour cream, stir in a few tablespoons of the sauce, and then pour the sour cream mixture into the sauce, whisking vigorously to blend. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes to blend the flavors. Meanwhile, slice the roast thinly. Serve with the gravy and a sprinkling of parsley.

#### POT ROAST WITHOUT A SLOW COOKER

If you don't have a slow cooker, you can still make this pot roast, just make the following modifications to the recipe. Heat the oven to 250°F. Sear the meat in a heavy Dutch oven or similar pot. Transfer the meat to a plate. Add the broth mixture to the pot and bring to a simmer. Return the meat to the pot and turn once to coat the meat in the broth. Scatter the vegetables and herbs around the meat, return to a simmer, cover tightly, and roast in the oven until the meat is very tender, about 4 hours. Check occasionally to be sure the broth isn't bubbling too rapidly, and flip the meat if the top surface looks dry.

## Gentle simmering is the key to tender stews

If it's true that a watched pot never boils, then you'll want to keep a vigilant eye on the stove whenever you're braising or stewing meat, because an actual boil would be bad news. Prolonged boiling usually results in a tough texture because the meat overcooks before its connective tissue, called collagen, gets a chance

to break down. A slow simmer, characterized by bubbles lazily and occasionally breaking the surface, cooks the meat gently while allowing the collagen to break down, so you get a perfectly tender result. Slow cookers are excellent at maintaining this gentle cooking environment.

—J. A.



## Slice your own chicken cutlets

Most markets carry packages of thinly sliced chicken breasts, which are also called chicken cutlets. Although they're convenient, I find these pre-sliced cutlets are often very poorly trimmed, and sometimes they appear to come from oversized, tough breasts. That's why I usually buy boneless, skinless breasts and take the few extra minutes of trimming and slicing them myself. —J. A.



*Remove the tenderloin from the bottom of the breast, if it's still there. Cut the chicken breast in half crosswise. Set aside the tenderloin and the thin triangle-shaped half of the breast.*



*Horizontally slice the thick breast piece completely in half.*

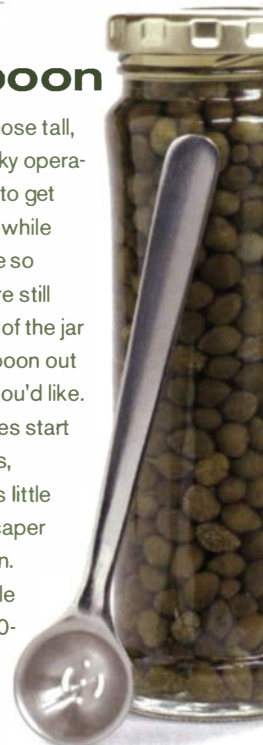


*You now have three (or four, if there's a tenderloin) pieces of chicken breast that are fairly similar in size and that can be pounded to the thinness you want.*

### favorite gadget

## Caper spoon

Fishing capers out of those tall, skinny jars can be a tricky operation. Usually the goal is to get out some of the capers while leaving behind the brine so the remaining capers are still covered, but the shape of the jar forces you to pour or spoon out more of the brine than you'd like. So until caper companies start using more sensible jars, we're happy to have this little stainless-steel slotted caper spoon in the test kitchen. It's \$2.50 at Sur La Table stores; to order, call 800-243-0852 (product #55913). —J. A.



## Eggs three ways

A fried or poached egg makes a great topper for the salmon hash on p. 51. Start cooking your eggs several minutes before the hash is done. Poached eggs can be cooked all together, but fried eggs are easier to cook singly; keep them hot by undercooking them slightly and holding them on an oiled baking sheet in a 200°F oven. —J. A.



**Fried eggs, sunny side up**

Crack an egg into a cup. Heat about 2 teaspoons butter or oil in a small nonstick skillet over medium heat. When the fat is hot, slip in the egg, season it with salt and pepper, and turn the heat to medium low or low. Cook until done to your liking, 1 to 2 minutes, basting the egg white with the fat to help it set.



**Fried eggs, over easy**

Begin cooking as you would for sunny-side-up eggs, but rather than basting the egg, flip it gently with a spatula after the first side has set, and continue to cook for another minute, or until done to your liking.



**Poached eggs**

Fill a deep, wide pot with at least 4 inches of water. For every gallon of water, add 2 tablespoons white vinegar and 1 tablespoon kosher salt. Bring to a bare simmer. Crack each egg into a cup. One by one and without crowding, slip the eggs into the water and simmer ever so gently for 3 to 4 minutes, or until done to your liking. Use a slotted spoon or skimmer to retrieve the eggs, drain on paper towels (blot to dry as well) and use a paring knife to trim any ragged whites.



**ingredient**

## Asian chile paste

**A**lthough chiles are native to the New World, once they crossed the Pacific, they became wildly popular in Eastern Asian cuisines. In addition to using fresh and dried chiles, East Asian cooks also rely on a variety of prepared chile pastes and sauces to add spicy heat to their dishes. Asian chile pastes and sauces (the distinction between the two having more to do with what their manufacturers choose to call them than with their consistency) are made primarily from ground chiles, oil or vinegar, and salt. They may also include other flavors, such as garlic, ginger, sugar, sesame, black beans, or soybeans. If garlic is added, the product is often identified as “chile paste with garlic” or “chile-garlic paste,” and if soybeans predominate, it’s called “hot bean paste.” Unlike most of the thin, smooth, chile-based hot sauces of the Americas, Asian chile pastes tend to be coarse and on the thick side, full of bits of ground chiles and sometimes whole seeds. Pastes from Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Vietnam are typically bottled fresh,

while Chinese and Korean pastes are usually fermented first.

**Where and what to buy:** You’ll find the broadest variety of chile pastes at an Asian grocery store. Be sure the first ingredient listed is chiles. Chile pastes aren’t usually labeled as to their heat intensity, so experiment to find a brand you like. A few of our favorites are Lan Chi brand in glass jars, Szechwan brand in cans (both are Chinese), and Indonesian-style sambal oelek by Huy Fong Foods in plastic jars.

**How to use and store:** You can spice up anything with chile paste. Add it at the beginning of cooking if you want it to really permeate the dish, or at the end if you want more of a surface heat. Until you’re familiar with the heat level or the brand you’re using, start with a very small amount; you can always add more. Some pastes separate during storage, so stir them before using. Once opened, chile pastes will last indefinitely if tightly covered and refrigerated. Transfer canned paste to a jar before storing because the metal can get unpleasant. —J. A.



### Orange-Chile Stir-Fry

*Serves two to three.*

- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1½ tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ cup low-salt canned chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
- 1 tablespoon dry sherry
- ½ teaspoon finely grated orange zest
- ½ teaspoon toasted sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 heaping tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 2 scallions (white and green parts), thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon chile paste; more if you want it really spicy
- ½ pound assorted vegetables, trimmed and thinly sliced or cut into small pieces
- ½ pound thinly sliced meat or seafood
- Cooked white rice for serving

In a small bowl, dissolve the cornstarch in 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce. Stir in the remaining soy sauce, the broth, orange juice, sherry, orange zest, and sesame oil. Heat the vegetable oil in a stir-fry pan or large skillet over medium-high to high heat. Add the ginger, garlic, scallions, and chile paste and stir-fry until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the vegetables and stir-fry until crisp-tender (if you’re using some long-cooking vegetables like broccoli, add them before shorter cooking ones to give them a head start). Add the meat or seafood and stir-fry until just cooked through and the vegetables are tender. Stir the sauce mixture and pour it into the pan. Bring to a boil just to thicken. Serve the stir-fry over rice.



# <sup>fine</sup> Cooking

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tasting panel

## canned whole peeled tomatoes

**C**anned whole peeled tomatoes in their juice are ideal for sauces, soups, and stews, like the Chicken Cacciatore on p. 37. For this issue we held a blind tasting of these tomatoes, just slightly heated, and we were amazed by what we tasted. We found a few particularly likable brands out there—all American—and then there were the not-so-encouraging others. All the brands in the tasting are either nationally available or widely available on regional levels in supermarkets. They were evaluated for the flavor and consistency of their juice, the texture and strength of tomato flavor of the tomatoes, and overall likability.

—Maryellen Driscoll, editor at large

### top pick

#### MUIR GLEN

\$2.39 (28 ounces)

The definitive favorite, this organic product was praised because the tomatoes tasted like they had been picked ripe from the vine. The flavor was clean and well balanced with bright acidity and tomato sweetness. The



juice was liked for its tomatoey flavor and body—not too watery and not too purée-like. Available in natural-foods stores and some supermarkets.

### TASTING RESULTS

Tomatoes numbered in order of preference



#### 2 PROGRESSO

\$1.39 (28 ounces)

The solid second-place finisher, this product was not especially full-flavored, but neither were there any off flavors. The tomatoes were mildly sweet and likably firm, and the juice was pleasantly salty.



#### 3 REDPACK

\$1.29 (28 ounces)

Another close runner-up, this robust product was distinctly tomatoey with hints of “summer-ripe flavor,” a mild sweetness to its finish, and a whole lot of acidity. The juice was thick like a purée.



#### 4 RIENZI

\$1.19 (28 ounces)

With a lack of discernable tomato flavor, this product from Italy wasn’t especially exciting. The tomatoes were watery and metallic; the juice was bitter but slightly sweet.



#### 5 SAN MARZANO

\$1.79 (28 ounces)

Sweet was the defining characteristic of these tomatoes, and too much so. A feeble tomato essence drifted off too quickly. The tomatoes were grown in the U.S.; this brand name is not to be confused with the expensive and increasingly hard-to-find San Marzano tomato variety grown in Italy.



#### 6 HUNT'S

\$1.49 (28 ounces)

Although the juice was “sunny-sweet” with a hint of salt, the tomatoes tasted washed out, bitter, and harshly acidic, and they were mushy.



#### 7 CENTO

\$1.79 (35 ounces)

Both the juice and tomatoes in this Italian import were extremely bitter and acidic, overwhelming any tomato flavor that may have been there.

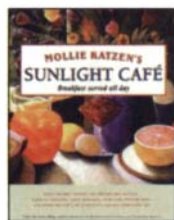


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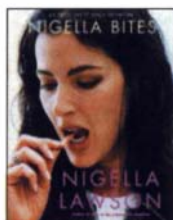
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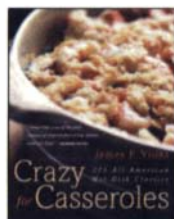
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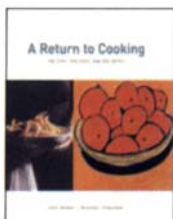
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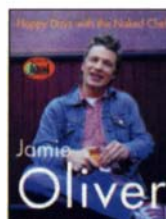
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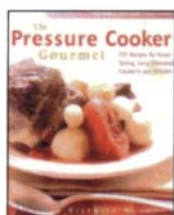
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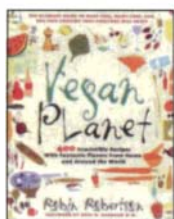
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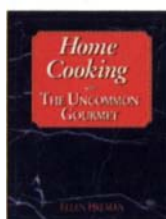
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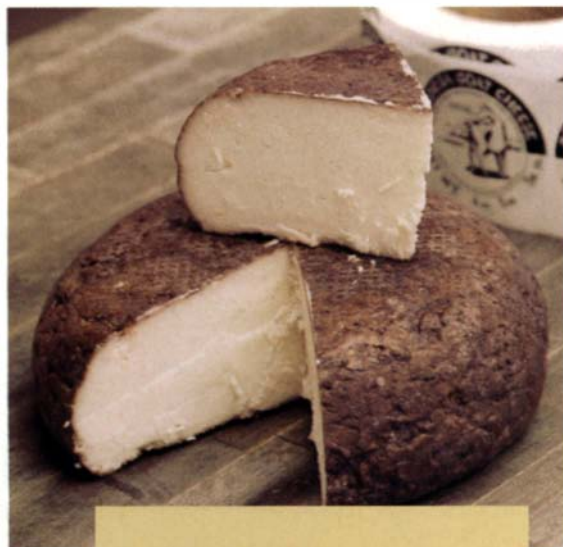
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### FROM THE BACK COVER

For more information about **Bodega Goat Cheese**, call 707-876-3483 or visit [www.bodegagoatcheese.com](http://www.bodegagoatcheese.com).

### Mashed Potatoes *p. 44*

For mashing potatoes, **A Cook's Wares** ([www.cookswares.com](http://www.cookswares.com); 800-915-9788) carries sturdy Oxo Good Grips potato ricers for \$19.90. The company also sells 10- and 11-inch potato mashers for \$10 and \$15, respectively.

### Oven-Roasted Ribs *p. 56*

For a broiler pan for making slow-roasted ribs, try **ePotsPans.com**, where a large Roshco nonstick broiler pan is \$12.99.

### Asian Noodle Soups *p. 60*

**The CMC Company** (800-262-2780; [www.thecmccompany.com](http://www.thecmccompany.com)) sells a 4-ounce package of dried Japanese shiitakes for \$11.25. CMC also carries dried udon and dried rice noodles. Look up **Penzeys Spices** (800-741-7787; [www.penzeys.com](http://www.penzeys.com)) for

spices like turmeric, coriander seeds, and fennel seeds.

### Equipment *p. 20*

Polder makes a timer with a digital thermometer probe that snakes into your slow cooker for a convenient way to check when your roast is done. **Kitchen Emporium** ([www.kitchenemporium.com](http://www.kitchenemporium.com); 888-858-7920) sells it for \$25.49.

### Pots de Crème *p. 64*

For a good selection of ramekins and custard cups, visit **Kitchen.ontheweb.com** or **Dorothy McNett's Place** ([www.happycookers.com](http://www.happycookers.com); 831-637-6444). **Meadowsweets** ([www.candiedflowers.com](http://www.candiedflowers.com); 888-827-6477) sells crystallized pansies, daisies, and roses (among other flowers) for garnishing your pots de crème; a minimum flower order is \$30.



### From Our Test Kitchen *p. 68*

The chile pastes listed in this department can be found at most Asian groceries. **The Oriental Pantry** ([www.orientalpantry.com](http://www.orientalpantry.com); 978-264-4576) also carries a few of them. An 8-ounce jar of Lan Chi chile paste with garlic is \$2.99, and an 18-ounce bottle of Huy Fong Foods sambal oelek is \$3.49.

## Sweet, smoky chipotle chiles

Chipotles, dried and smoked jalapeños, date back to the Aztecs, who first smoked the thick-skinned peppers to help preserve them. Today, you generally find chipotles (pronounced che-POHT-lays) dried (above) or rehydrated in a spicy-sweet sauce called adobo; the latter are generally canned (below). Check your supermarket for dried chipotles, which Tony Rosenfeld uses in his chicken and black bean stew ("Chicken Stews," p. 36). To order them, try **Chile Today, Hot Tamale** ([www.chiletoday.com](http://www.chiletoday.com); 800-468-7377); a 1¼-ounce package is \$3. The canned chipotles in adobo that Cheryl and Bill Jamison use in their Southwestern Bloody Mary ("Breakfast with Friends," p. 48) are also sold at most supermarkets. We like La Morena and Embasa brands, both of which are carried by **MexGrocer.com** (877-463-9476). There, a 7-ounce can of La Morena chipotles is \$1.50 and a 7-ounce can of Embasa chipotles is \$2.25.



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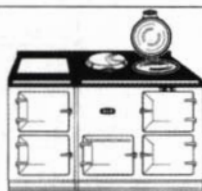


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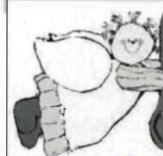
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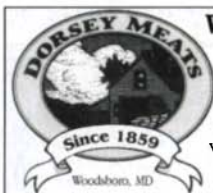
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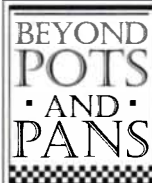
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# nutritioninformation

Recipe (analysis )	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol	Sodium	Fiber	Notes
	total	fromfat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	
In Season, p. 16												
Warm Cabbage Slaw w/Bacon Dressing	130	100	3	5	11	4	5	1	15	230	2	based on 6 servings
World Cuisines, p. 28												
Tostones (Pan-Fried Green Plantains)	50	25	0	7	2.5	0	1.5	1	0	480	1	per tostone
Baked Plantains w/Brown Sugar & Rum	310	60	2	63	6	4	2	0	15	9	3	
Chicken Stews, p. 36												
Chicken Cacciatore w/Mushrooms & Zucchini	240	120	17	14	13	2	8	2	55	460	4	based on 6 servings
Southwestern Spiced Chicken Stew	350	180	22	20	20	6	10	3	70	390	6	based on 6 servings
Chicken Stew w/ Spinach, Potatoes, & Porcini	280	110	18	22	13	2	8	2	60	330	2	based on 6 servings
Chicken Thighs w/Sausage & Braised Fennel	380	180	31	17	20	6	11	2	90	670	3	based on 6 servings
Roasted Beets, p. 41												
Quick-Roasted Beet Slices	110	60	2	11	7	1	5	1	0	330	3	per tablespoon
Frisly Lettuce Salad on a Bed of Beets	260	190	6	14	21	4	9	7	10	490	4	
Lemon-Walnut Vinaigrette	80	80	0	1	8	1	4	3	0	140	0	
Slow-Roasted Beet Wedges	90	40	2	11	4.5	0.5	3.5	0.5	0	330	3	
Warm Roasted Beets & Shallots	200	120	8	13	13	2	9	1	15	860	3	
Mashed Potatoes, p. 44												
Ultimate Fluffy Mashed Potatoes	260	150	4	25	17	11	5	1	60	190	2	based on 6 servings
Creamy Mashed Yukon Golds	170	60	4	26	6	4	2	0	15	210	2	based on 6 servings
Smashed Red-Skinned Potatoes w/Boursin	130	70	5	10	8	6	1	1	25	280	4	based on 6 servings
Breakfast Menu, p. 48												
Spicy Southwestern Bloody Mary	130	0	2	12	0	0	0	0	0	1160	2	w/1 oz. vodka
Salmon Hash w/Dilled Crème Fraiche	590	350	33	26	39	18	11	8	170	540	4	w/o optional garnishes)
Herbed Buttermilk Biscuit	130	50	3	17	5	2	2	1	5	300	1	per 2-inch biscuit
Broiled Grapefruit	130	50	1	20	6	4	2	0	15	5	2	
Chocolate-Chip Cookies, p. 53												
Thin & Crisp Chocolate-Chip Cookies	100	50	1	12	5	3.5	1.5	0	15	55	0	per cookie
Thick & Chewy Chocolate-Chip Cookies	70	30	1	10	3.5	2	1	0	10	40	0	per cookie
Oven-Roasted Ribs, p. 56												
Slow-Cooked Memphis Ribs	230	150	15	4	17	6	7	3	60	360	1	per rib, based on 26 ribs
Chinese-Style Spareribs	210	140	15	3	15	5	7	1	60	430	0	per rib, based on 26 ribs
Asian Noodle Soups, p. 60												
Cinnamon Beef Noodle Soup	490	260	31	25	29	11	13	2	100	1360	2	based on 8 servings
Spicy Noodle Soup w/Shrimp & Coconut Milk	560	270	24	55	30	20	5	3	135	2100	4	based on 4 servings
Chicken Noodle Soup w/ Ginger & Shiitakes	210	50	17	20	6	1	2	2	65	1140	2	based on 6 servings
Pots de Crème, p. 64												
Chocolate Pots de Crème	590	480	7	26	54	31	16	3	430	55	1	
Lemon Pots de Crème	510	400	6	24	45	26	14	2	410	50	0	
Coffee-Caramel Pots de Crème	500	400	6	20	45	26	14	2	410	50	0	
From Our Test Kitchen, p. 68												
Orange-Chile Stir-Fry	280	130	22	14	15	3	4	6	80	640	3	based on 3 servings (w/o rice)
Slow-Cooked Pot Roast	590	210	67	10	24	9	13	1	200	420	2	
Quick & Delicious, p. 82C												
Double-Cheese Penne w/Sausage	610	250	40	49	28	11	13	3	65	1270	4	based on 6 servings
Chicken Piccata w/ Fried Capers	420	280	32	3	31	10	15	4	115	430	0	based on 3 servings
Stir-Fried Shrimp w/Spinach & Peanut Noodles	330	120	29	25	14	3	5	5	190	1920	5	based on 4 servings
Crisp Cod w/Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce	290	80	38	16	8	1	4	3	75	1600	1	
Seared Strip Steak w/Couscous Tabbouleh	610	320	53	20	35	8	21	2	130	380	3	w/o pita
Spanish Braised Spinach w/Chickpeas	260	130	8	26	14	3	8	2	5	390	6	per side dish serving
Potato, Asparagus & Fennel Ragoût	220	110	9	24	12	3	8	1	5	480	10	based on 3 servings
Chocolate French Toast Sandwiches	270	140	7	27	16	9	4	1	135	290	2	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe

gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific

quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

# AUSTRALIAN LAMB

*easy as one, two, three*



**ONE** LEG OF AUSTRALIAN LAMB AND ONE TABLESPOON OF DRIED ROSEMARY



**TWO.** CUT SLITS IN LAMB, INSERT SIX GARLIC CLOVES.



**THREE** TABLESPOONS OF OLIVE OIL.

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**Australian Lamb.**

*For this Classic Leg of Lamb recipe and others, please visit **[www.australian-lamb.com](http://www.australian-lamb.com)**. Also, check out the listing of retailers near you.*





On a sustainable farm, everything has a use. Patty and Javier feed the herd with farm-grown feed as well as whey drained from the morning's batch of Queso Fresco, their version of fresh feta cheese. Below, the curds for the cheese are cut and then poured into molds. After draining, the rounds are unmolded and ready for market, just a day after the goats were milked.

**D**elicious handmade goat cheese and the land-friendly methods known as sustainable farming dovetail neatly at Bodega Goat Cheese, the small, family farm that Patty Karlin and Javier Salmon have owned and run for nearly twenty years.



BY AMY ALBERT

Another cheese, Queso Cabrero, is soaked in red wine after aging. It's similar to Manchego, a Spanish cheese traditionally made from sheep's milk. Queso Cabrero is delicious for grating and melting, and it's good all by itself, too, "like getting your wine and cheese in one bite," says Patty.



BY THE FINE COOKING STAFF



## Double-Cheese Penne with Sausage & Hot Cherry Peppers (Cover Recipe)

*Serves four to six.*

**Kosher salt**  
**2 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil**  
**¾ lb. dried penne or ziti**  
**1 lb. sweet Italian sausage (4 or 5 links), casings removed**  
**2 large cloves garlic, minced (about 2 tsp.)**  
**1 can (28 oz.) whole peeled tomatoes**  
**2 or 3 pickled Italian hot cherry peppers (from the jar), cored, seeded, and diced (about 1½ Tbs.)**  
**¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano (about 2½ oz.); more for sprinkling**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**  
**8 oz. shredded low-moisture part-skim mozzarella (about 2 cups)**

In a large covered pot, bring 4 quarts salted water to a boil. Lightly grease an 8x11-inch baking dish or 6 individual (1½-cup) gratin dishes with 1 tsp. of the olive oil.

Add the penne or ziti to the boiling water and cook until it's just tender but still firm to the tooth, about 11 minutes. Drain the pasta well and return it to its cooking pot.

Meanwhile, heat the remaining 2 Tbs. oil in a large straight-sided skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the sausage, let it sit for a minute, and then start stirring and breaking it into bite-size pieces with the side of a slot-

ted metal spoon. Cook until lightly browned, another 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a plate using the slotted spoon.

Add the garlic to the pan, season with salt, and cook, stirring constantly, until it colors slightly, about 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes and their juices and cook at a rapid simmer, stirring occasionally and breaking up the tomatoes with the spoon, for 5 minutes so the sauce thickens slightly.

Meanwhile, position an oven rack about 6 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler on high. Stir the sausage and its juices, the diced peppers, and ⅓ cup of the Parmigiano into the sauce. Cook, stirring, until the sausage is cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes. Taste for salt and pepper. Pour the sauce over the cooked pasta in the pot and stir well. Spread the pasta and sauce evenly in the baking dish or gratin dishes. Sprinkle with the mozzarella and the remaining ⅓ cup Parmigiano. Put the baking dish or gratin dishes on a baking sheet and broil until the cheese melts and browns in places, 2 to 4 minutes (check often to be sure they don't burn). Serve immediately with more Parmigiano, if you like.



## Chicken Piccata with Fried Capers

*Serves two to three.*

**2 Tbs. drained nonpareil capers**  
**2 Tbs. olive oil**  
**1 lb. thin chicken breast cutlets (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 71)**  
**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 clove garlic, finely chopped**  
**½ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**  
**2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**  
**½ tsp. honey**  
**2 Tbs. cold unsalted butter, cut into 3 pieces**  
**1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Rinse the capers and pat them dry with paper towels. Heat the oil in a 10-inch non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the capers and stir-fry until most of them open like flowers and become crisp and slightly brown, 30 to 60 seconds. Remove the skillet from the heat and transfer the capers to a dry paper towel with a soup spoon, tilting each spoonful against the side of the pan to let excess oil drain back into the pan.

Season the chicken cutlets with salt and pepper. Heat the skillet over medium high and sauté the cutlets in batches until golden brown and just cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer the cooked chicken to a plate and cover to keep warm.

With the pan still over medium-high heat, add the garlic and sauté until lightly golden, about 30 seconds. Add the broth and scrape the pan bottom with a wooden spoon to dissolve any browned bits. Boil the broth until it's reduced by about half. Stir in the lemon juice and honey. Off the heat, add the butter and swirl the pan until the butter melts and thickens the sauce. Stir in the parsley and about half of the capers. Adjust the salt and pepper, if needed. Spoon the sauce over the chicken, scatter the remaining capers over it, and serve.





**Spanish Braised Spinach with Chickpeas**  
*Serves six as a side dish.*

- 3 Tbs. olive oil**
- 3 slices bacon (about 2 oz.)**
- 6 cloves garlic, 3 whole and 3 chopped medium fine**
- 6 slices (¼-inch thick) baguette or crusty country bread (about 1½ oz. total)**
- ½ tsp. ground cumin**
- ¼ tsp. paprika**
- 20 oz. fresh spinach, stemmed, washed, drained, and coarsely chopped**
- 1 can (15½ ounces) chickpeas, rinsed and drained**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 Tbs. sherry vinegar or another wine vinegar**

In a large, straight-sided skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat and add the bacon. Cook, flipping occasionally, until the bacon is golden and crisp, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels. Add the 3 whole cloves of garlic and the bread to the pan and sauté until the garlic is tender and golden and the bread is deep golden brown on both sides, 4 to 5 minutes. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the whole garlic cloves and 4 of the toasts to a mortar (or a small food processor). Set aside the

remaining 2 slices of toast on a paper towel.

To the same skillet, add the 3 cloves chopped garlic, the cumin, and the paprika. Cook, stirring, until fragrant and the garlic begins to brown, 15 to 30 seconds. Increase the heat to medium high and immediately begin adding the spinach in batches, stirring to wilt. When all the spinach is in the pan, add the chickpeas, 1 cup water, 1 tsp. salt, and several grinds of black pepper. Bring to a simmer.

Meanwhile, mash the bread slices and garlic in the mortar or process in the processor (don't mash the 2 reserved bread slices) with the vinegar and 1 to 2 Tbs. water until puréed.

Stir the mashed bread mixture into the spinach, lower the heat to medium, and simmer until the liquid has reduced almost completely but the spinach is still moist, about 10 minutes. Crumble the bacon and stir it in. Taste and add more salt or vinegar if needed. Crumble the reserved toast over the spinach. Serve hot or warm.



**Crisp Cod with Soy-Ginger Dipping Sauce**  
*Serves four.*

- 1½ Tbs. grated fresh ginger**
- ⅓ cup soy sauce**
- 1 Tbs. rice vinegar**
- 4 scallions (white and green parts), thinly sliced (about ½ cup)**
- 1½ lb. cod fillet (or any other mild, firm white-fleshed fish), cut into four 6-oz. pieces**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup flour for dredging**
- 4 egg whites**
- 1 large clove garlic, minced**
- 2 small fresh red chiles (or 1 fresh jalapeño), cored, seeded, and minced**
- 2 Tbs. canola or peanut oil**
- 1 lime, cut into 8 wedges**

In a small bowl, mix 1 Tbs. of the ginger, the soy sauce, vinegar, 2 Tbs. water, and about a quarter of the scallions. Set the dipping sauce aside.

Rinse the cod and pat dry it with paper towels. Season both sides lightly with salt and pepper. Put the flour in a shallow bowl. Put the egg whites in a medium bowl and whisk until a thick foam forms on the surface. To the egg whites, add the garlic, chiles, and the remaining

ginger and scallions and mix well.

Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Dredge each piece of cod on both sides first in the flour and then in the egg whites, using your hands to press the scallions and chiles onto the fish. Transfer to a plate.

When the oil is hot (it will bubble if you put a scallion ring in it), add the cod, spacing the pieces evenly (you may have to cook them in two batches), and raise the heat to medium high. Turn the fish over after 3 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium and cook until the fish is firm to the touch and flakes apart easily when pierced with a fork, about another 4 minutes. Serve immediately with the dipping sauce and the lime wedges on the side.

**Serving suggestion:** Serve with white rice and spinach sautéed with garlic, or with brothly soba noodles.



### Stir-Fried Shrimp with Spinach & Peanut Noodles

*Serves three to four.*

**Kosher salt**  
**¼ cup smooth peanut butter**  
**1-inch chunk fresh ginger**  
 (about ½ oz.), peeled and  
 thinly sliced  
**2 Tbs. soy sauce**  
**1 Tbs. rice vinegar**  
**¼ tsp. chile paste or hot sauce**  
**1 Tbs. vegetable oil**  
**1 lb. large shrimp (21 to 25 per**  
**lb.), peeled and deveined**  
**1 clove garlic, thinly sliced**  
**9 oz. fresh Chinese egg**  
**noodles (or 8 oz. dried**  
**spaghetti)**  
**10 oz. fresh spinach, thick**  
**stems removed, large**  
**leaves torn in half, washed,**  
**and dried**  
**Green part of 1 scallion, thinly**  
**sliced (about 1 Tbs.)**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Meanwhile, in a mini chopper or a small food processor, combine the peanut butter, ginger, soy sauce, rice vinegar, chile paste, and 1 teaspoon of the oil. Process, scraping the sides as needed, until mostly smooth.

Heat the remaining 2 teaspoons oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil is very hot (it should be shimmering), add the shrimp and stir frequently until the shrimp start to look pink on

both sides and opaque in the middle, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl. Reduce the heat to medium, add the garlic and cook until softened and lightly golden, about 30 to 60 seconds. Pour ½ cup water into the pan and stir to loosen any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Pour the water and the garlic into the peanut butter purée and process to blend until smooth.

Cook the noodles in the boiling water until just tender, 3 to 5 minutes (if using dried pasta, see the package for cooking times). Stir in the spinach and blanch until it softens, about 30 seconds. Drain the noodles and spinach and transfer to the bowl with the shrimp. Pour the sauce over the noodles and toss. Garnish with the scallion and serve immediately.

#### tip

➤ Look for fresh egg noodles in the produce section of the supermarket near the tofu and egg roll wrappers.



### Chocolate French Toast Sandwiches

*Serves four as dessert or part of a brunch.*

**4 slices white sandwich bread (like Pepperidge**  
**Farm sandwich bread), fresh or slightly stale**  
**1½ to 2 oz. good-quality semisweet chocolate**  
 (preferably from a thin bar)  
**2 large eggs**  
**2 Tbs. granulated sugar**  
**½ cup half-and-half**  
**1 tsp. pure vanilla extract**  
**¼ tsp. kosher salt**  
**2 Tbs. unsalted butter**  
**Confectioners' sugar**

Cut each piece of bread into four triangles by slicing diagonally. Cut or break the chocolate into 8 pieces, roughly the same triangle shape as the bread pieces but slightly smaller by at least ¼ inch all the way around.

In a medium bowl, vigorously whisk together the eggs and sugar until well combined. Add the half-and-half, vanilla, and salt and whisk until combined. Put the bread pieces in the bowl and press down gently to make sure they're all soaked.

Heat 1 Tbs. of the butter in a medium nonstick skillet over medium heat. When the butter is melted and sizzling, add half of the bread pieces in one layer, leaving a little space between each. Cook until nicely browned, about 2 minutes. Turn each piece over with a spatula and cook until the other side is nicely browned, 1½ to 2 minutes. Transfer the bread pieces to a plate lined with paper towels and take the skillet off the heat. Put a triangle of chocolate on half of the bread pieces, and top each with another piece of bread (save the best-looking pieces for the tops). Let them sit while you return the pan to the heat, melt the remaining 1 Tbs. butter, cook the remaining bread, and fill it with the remaining chocolate. When all the chocolate sandwiches are made, arrange two, overlapping slightly, on each of four plates. Sprinkle the confectioners' sugar generously over all and serve warm.





## Seared Strip Steak with Lemony Couscous Tabbouleh

*Serves four.*

- 6 Tbs. couscous**
- 6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt**
- 2 New York strip steaks (or loin steaks), each 1 inch thick (about 1½ lb. total)**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 tsp. ground cumin**
- 1½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme**
- 3 Tbs. chopped fresh mint**
- 3 ripe plum tomatoes, cored and cut into ½-inch dice (about 1½ cups)**
- 2 cups loosely packed chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (from about 2 large bunches)**
- 4 scallions (white and green parts), thinly sliced (about ½ cup)**
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more if needed**
- Warmed pita bread, cut into wedges**

Heat the oven to 400°F.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, bring ½ cup water to a boil. Remove from the heat, add the couscous, 1 Tbs. of the olive oil, and ¼ tsp. salt. Stir well, cover the pan, and let sit for 5 minutes. Fluff the couscous with a fork and spread on a large plate to cool.

Meanwhile, season the steaks on all sides with 1½ tsp. salt and a few generous twists of pepper. In a small bowl, mix the cumin,

thyme, and 1 Tbs. of the mint and rub all over the steaks.

In a large bowl, season the tomatoes with 1 tsp. salt and a few generous grinds of black pepper. Add the couscous, parsley, scallions, and 1 Tbs. of the mint and toss. In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon juice and 3 Tbs. of the olive oil. Add to the couscous mixture and toss well. Taste and add more lemon juice if needed.

Heat a large cast-iron pan or a large, heavy oven-proof skillet over medium-high heat. When the pan is very hot (water spattered over the pan will immediately evaporate), add the remaining 2 Tbs. oil and the steaks; sear, moving them only to flip, for 2 minutes on each side. Put the skillet in the oven and cook for about 5 minutes for medium rare. Transfer the steaks to a carving board and let them rest for 5 minutes before slicing them into thin strips. Sprinkle with the remaining 1 Tbs. mint and serve with the tabbouleh and pieces of warmed pita bread.



## Potato, Asparagus & Fennel Ragoût

*Serves two to three as a main course.*

- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 small onion, sliced into wedges about ½-inch thick at the widest point**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 lb. thick asparagus, bottoms trimmed, spears cut into 2-inch pieces**
- 1 large bulb fresh fennel (about 1 lb.), fibrous outer layer removed, cored, and cut into ¼-inch dice**
- 10 oz. red-skinned potatoes (about 2 medium), scrubbed and cut into ½-inch chunks**
- 2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- 1 Tbs. heavy cream**
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh dill or flat-leaf parsley**
- ½ lemon**

Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a large saucepan or a small Dutch oven. Add the onion, along with a few pinches of salt and a few grinds of pepper. Cook, stirring frequently, until the onion softens and starts to turn golden, about 5 minutes. Add the asparagus, fennel, and potatoes to the pot, along with a few more pinches of salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, until the vegetables are well coated with oil and the asparagus has turned bright green, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the chicken broth, raise the heat to high, and cover the pot. When it comes to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and keep the broth at a lively simmer. Cook, covered, until the potatoes are tender, 7 to 10 minutes. Stir in the cream, mustard, dill or parsley, and a squeeze or two of lemon juice. Adjust the seasonings and serve.

### tips

- ◆ You can use thin asparagus instead of thick, but add it 5 minutes after you've added the fennel and potatoes.
- ◆ If you like, top the ragoût with a dollop of crème fraîche or sour cream and more chopped dill or parsley.